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A Story of Fighting Yesterdays in the Balkans

By

CORRINNE S. and R. A. TSANOFF



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NOTE

A good story should require no preface, and yet a word of explanation may add to the interest of the reader's acquaintance with the lives and characters revealed below.

While the writers do not pose as the chroniclers of a "true story," they are not narrating the imaginary troubles of an imagined folk somewhere southeast of Vienna. "Pawns of Liberty" has Macedonia-of-yesterday for its setting, but a good deal of its inspiration comes from the actual history of Bulgaria-of-the-day-before. The Balkan War, and the revolts of the Bulgar natives in Macedonia which preceded it, only continued the Bulgarian struggle for liberation which made the sixties and seventies of the last century years of tragic glory in the Balkans. The children of the Bulgarian '76 became the leaders of the Macedonian revolts during the past two decades. For Macedonia and Thrace are inhabited largely by Bulgars, and the revolution was naturally a Bulgarian movement.

The Bulgar men and women, as well as the

NOTE

Turks in this tale, are not without their historical prototypes, as can be substantiated by the historical and semi-historical memoirs and chronicles of Bulgarian revolutionists and prisoners in Constantinopolitan and other Turkish jails,—an unworked mine of human documents, of which the writers have made liberal use.

PAWNS OF LIBERTY

CHAPTER I

IN THE TWO-LEGGED HOUSE ON THE RIVER

SHAPED like the two legs of a right triangle, the house presented an almost windowless back to the street, ugly, uninviting. Through a heavy door, built under an archway of stone, one entered into an inside court on which all the windows of the house opened. A balcony ran the entire length of the second floor, throwing the interior into comparative shadow.

The two legs of the house waded clear into the Ladna River, which laved the hypotenuse,—a solid stone-wall twelve feet high, built right in the water. Pieces of broken glass and jagged bottles projected forbiddingly from the mortar which held them secure, and made approach from the river a venturesome undertaking.

The rooms on the upper floor, connecting with one another throughout, ended in a brightly lighted studio that looked up and down the river and over to the opposite bank, where the newer portions of the town of Goreno climbed a steeply ascending slope to the Pirin Mountains of northern Macedonia, a long chain of riotous autumn

color, topped with the elusive blue of a cloudless sky-line.

Palettes and unwashed paint-brushes and an unfinished canvas or two mingled with coats and vests and sundry bachelor garments. Utter artistic disorder pervaded the room. The walls were lined with paintings, obviously original and mostly of an allegorical character: Balkan maidens with rosy cheeks, carmine lips, and night-black eyes shot adoring glances at trumpeting cherubim that seemed to rain down from heaven. Saints of both sexes and of all varieties rubbed elbows with classic Venuses in every manner of demure undress. Lions rampant surrounded a golden throne on which a fantastic crown, brilliant with apocalyptic gems, reposed expectantly. A whole side of the room was devoted to a battle-canvas in which Turkish fezes and Balkan sheepskin *kalpaks* [caps] mixed in the general mêlée. Above the smoke-turmoil, eagles and rooks floated ominously, and the pious gold of a monastery-cross glowed in the background.

Altogether, it was a room that whispered, if not of past, then of future mysteries.

About sundown, a boy's figure crept noiselessly into the studio. He opened a closet and got inside, but found it too narrow to be a comfortable hiding-place. For a while he stood undecided; then, with a sudden impulse, he rushed to the wide, wooden divan in the adjoining alcove that served as a bedroom, pulled off a

blanket and removed a cushion, re-arranging the rest so as to avoid detection, shoved aside the sliding panels of the divan, threw cushion and blanket underneath, and crawled in after them. A couple of noisy minutes followed while the lad was getting comfortably established. Then the panels closed together, and the clock ticked on undisturbed as before.

The twelve-year-old Mirko had done messenger duty for his brother Dobry the Iconograph [painter of religious pictures] too often not to have his curiosity whetted. On several occasions the same half-dozen men, invited to the studio, had stayed so late that he had always dropped off to sleep before he heard Dobry slam and bolt the iron gate.

And almost every time these men had come, there had been some out-of-town man to speak to them—and a stranger lot of strangers Mirko had never seen. They had given him hours of futile speculation. The American missionary, for instance, who had come to preach salvation to the studio-crowd the last time they met, left the house on the morning following the meeting, not in his missionary bought-in-the-city costume, but in the short jacket and baggy pantaloon garb of a mountain wood-cutter, with an ax over his shoulder!

And this same afternoon, when he had peeped through the keyhole, he had seen a beardless young monk, in hood and cassock, polishing a

murderous-looking dagger. What sort of a monk was this? A monk could pray and anathematize, but he wouldn't need to carry daggers. God would take care of him. To ask Dobry about it was out of the question. Mirko had decided to investigate directly, by inviting himself to this meeting.

The boy waited in the darkness for a while. Then, with a new idea, he crept quietly to the edge of the divan and pushed the sliding front-board a couple of finger-breadths. Surely no one could notice the difference from the outside, but to him it made all the difference in the world. He could hear the clock ticking away and, by applying his eye to the crevice, he had a fair view of the studio beyond the partition.

He settled back on the blanket-cushion to rest. He had had to hurry in order to carry his brother's message to all the guests and still be on hand early enough to put in practice his own eavesdropping scheme. To his Aunt Zora, who kept house for him and Dobry, he had mentioned going to the grandmother's overnight.

Mirko stretched his legs comfortably, grinning with expectation. To-night he'd know about *them*, who they were and what they were really after, talking all night with American missionaries and daggered monks. He was nervous with the excitement of a greedy curiosity about to be gratified.

But he had done some running out in the late

autumn afternoon. The room was warm, and he felt so cozy lying on his back with the heavy blanket about him! He found himself yawning. His eyes blinked, closed.

There seemed to be a quarrel between the monk and the missionary. The American wanted Dobry to paint an icon, not with real paint, but with Mirko's own blood, so as to make it powerful for life or death. But the young, beardless monk shook his dagger-handle and said no. Red paint was every bit as good, and, anyhow, he didn't believe in killing little fellows for the sake of the holiest icon of the holy.

He even threatened to throw the American out of the window. But the American made for Mirko and was just about to hammer his head on the anvil in the blacksmith's shop when——

"What was that? Didn't you hear?" It was the monk's voice. In a twinkling Mirko was wide-awake, and silent as death.

"Oh, some mouse a-scratching," Mirko heard his brother assure his guests. "Go on with what you were saying, Stoyan."

The boy dared not look through the crevice or make a single motion, but he could hear plainly.

"Well," Stoyan the Chandler was speaking, "late last night Selim, Murad Pasha's son, together with another Turk, broke into Zasho Doeff's house—above the Twisty Hollow, you know—pulled him out of bed, and wanted him

to roast a lamb for them right then and there. Zasho began to cross himself in holy terror. Roast a lamb with no fire in the oven! Why, it was plain they were trying to pick a quarrel, or something worse.

"They showed their teeth soon enough. Said a rooster would do perhaps, but in that case it must be cooked right. They had heard that Kalena, his young daughter, was expert at such things. She must do it for them.

"Zasho pleaded with them not to frighten his child; offered them his best ox for nothing if they'd only go and leave him in peace. But they hanged him, sandals up, to the cross-beam, raked up the fire, and started pounding at the poor girl's door."

"The dirty boars!" Dobry interrupted.

"All this while," Stoyan continued, "Zasho was yelling like mad. They were so excited that they hadn't thought of gagging him. A passing shepherd rushed in to see what was the matter. They hanged him head-down, too.

"The rascals battered at the door till it gave in, but when they rushed ahead the bedroom was empty. Kalena and her mother had escaped through the window and run in dead night all the way down to the huts by the Twisty Hollow. Half a dozen men came to Zasho's help, but found only the two poor souls still hanging, unconscious. Zasho came to, but there is no telling whether the shepherd will survive.

"They came to town riding on Zasho's two horses," Stoyan the Chandler finished, "and Selim has been boasting up and down town that he'd have Zasho's plump partridge daughter yet! Murad Pasha pretends not to know anything about the matter."

"Do you call this life, comrades? I call it a donkey's existence!" Dobry pounded his fist on the table to accentuate his words. "What are we to do, your Holiness?"

"Oh, talk about it, I suppose," the monk laughed bitterly. "Grow indignant. Write a letter to the Holy Exarch at Constantinople. But don't do anything, friends; and so your children and your children's children will live and die just like you."

"But, your Holiness, what are we to do?" Croom Dobreff the Carpenter was speaking. "We haven't rifles enough to go round, and as for ammunition——"

"That is just why his Holiness is here, Croom," Dobry declared. "His Holiness, as you know, is raising money to buy candles for the Monastery of Saint John the Thunderbolter and his pilgrims. I've ordered for myself two Mannlicher candlesticks and five hundred of those candles that are going to singe the life out of some pasha's rascal brood, or my hand is good for nothing but paint-brushes."

"Wish I were a moneyed icon-painter like you," Croom sighed. "All I have is fifty pias-

ters and that will have to go for the harem-tax next Monday."

"What harem-tax?" the monk queried.

"Don't you know?"

Mirko turned to the crevice and looked out. It was Ivan the Huntsman of the Pirin Mountains. He was seated on a three-legged stool at the end of the room, and in the dim light he looked larger and more ferocious than ever.

"Didn't Dobry tell you?" Ivan said. "This part of the country is to send two hundred thousand piasters' worth of taxes to Uskub before the end of the month. This is the value of our regular tithes,—and you know what a bad year this has been. In addition to this, Murad Pasha is levying a special tax of the same amount to build him a new summer harem on Bistra Lake. As if his old one across the river isn't enough! The old vulture must have a harem everywhere he lights!"

"How do you know about the despatch of that two hundred thousand this month?"

"I don't know for sure, your Holiness," Ivan answered, "but that is what I gathered from a remark of Selim's this morning at Stati's Inn."

"Two hundred thousand piasters would buy a lot of candlesticks and no end of candles, no end," the monk mused aloud.

"All it will buy for me will be a dozen kicks for not driving fast enough to suit the dirty hogs," Gani the Teamster muttered.

"They always have you drive the tax-money wagon, Gani?" the monk asked.

"Well, always for the last eight years, that is," Gani replied. "When they're ready to start, they call me to the *konak* stalls, and off we go. I never know in advance when the wagon is to start or which road we are to follow. That is their precaution against brigands. Selim says he trusts the reins in my hands but not the tongue in my mouth."

"What do you get out of your three days' drive to Uskub?"

"I get out alive usually," and Gani finished with some choice Balkan profanities. "That is all I ever will get, your Holiness. But you have been about more than we poor Gorenos devils. Tell us. When are we going to stettle with these blood-suckers? When is the fight to begin?"

"I've heard," Croom volunteered, "that next Good Friday night a ball of fire will shoot up the sky and put the very stars out. Then when it gets right over Gorenos, it will burst and change into a man with a bugle in his hand. When the bugle sounds, the empire of the Sultan will be no more."

"No, you haven't got it straight," old Uncle Dimo's voice came from the opposite corner of the room. Uncle Dimo was the Gorenos school-master and was very wise. "It will be a maid and not a man, and she will have a cross in one

hand and a sword in the other. Isn't that right, your Holiness?"

"The Turk will go when you chase him out, comrades, and no sooner," the monk declared emphatically. "It depends on you alone. Bulgarian blood must drown the tyrants. No sky-maiden's sword will save you. When you come to fight the Turk, you need a few more rifles and a caldron full of lead."

"Two hundred thousand masters!" Dobry repeated.

They were evidently one and all thinking of the same thing, but no one would venture to plunge into the matter first.

"Whichever road you take, Gani," the monk continued, "isn't there one place you must cross to get from Goreno to Uskub?"

"So there is," Gani answered. "Through the Krividol Gulch, every time."

"It is a pretty desert region, isn't it, Gani?"

"Gives me the creeps, it does, your Holiness, when I see those rocks overhead to the right, and the mad river down the gulch to the left."

"One man with a gun in ambush behind those rocks could easily hold half a dozen at bay, couldn't he, Gani?"

"Your Holiness!" Ivan cried out, but checked himself and listened on.

Mirko saw Zary the Cobbler jump from his chair, rush across the room, and grab the monk's hand.

"Beg your pardon if I'm rude, your Holiness, but I'm with you, any morning or night or noon-day you give the sign."

The cobbler crossed himself religiously and took his seat again.

"Take six men well-armed, Gani," the monk continued, "or a dozen, let us say—what would happen to the Turkish guards?"

"Nothing would happen to the half-dozen, I know," Gani laughed. "I see whither you are blowing, your Holiness, and if I am driving that wagon——"

"We'll have candlesticks aplenty before we are through," Dobry finished.

Under the divan Mirko trembled with excitement, but dared not stir for fear of being discovered.

"Are you sure, your Holiness," Ivan the Huntsman now spoke up, "are you sure it is a safe undertaking for the Cause at large?"

"Safe?" the monk answered, "why, no, Ivan, it is not safe. But it is necessary. The only danger comes after the deed is done—the danger that some one may blab."

"Goreno men are graves," Dobry assured them.

"It's dead men's tongues we have," Croom echoed. "I am with you any time you want me. I have a sister's wrong to avenge."

"Count me in, too!" Stoyan the Chandler added.

"And me!" Croom's brother Peter finished.

"Well, then, I guess my father up by the Seven Well-springs can be depended on to feed us while we are out in the Gulch," Ivan assured them. "Krividol is not so far from the Seven Well-springs, you know."

Uncle Dimo cleared his throat.

"Children," he said, "it is enough to make me weep with joy to see you so plucky and bold. In my days I did my share. My joints creak like a rickety wagon now, but if you'll take an old bones like me along——" He crossed himself.

"Good for you, uncle," the monk slapped him on the back. "That makes over six, and Gani in the driver's seat is good for another half-dozen. I can bring a handful or two of candles and the rest of the apparatus."

"Most important," Ivan said, "Turkish soldiers' costumes for all of us. You have them up in your monastery, don't you, your Holiness?"

"All you want, Ivan, up to a dozen."

"Well then, friends"—the huntsman rose—"the details you will learn later. But come, your Holiness, and swear the comrades to death-secrecy and good faith. Then we must discuss the affairs of the Goreno organization."

The monk drew near, and Mirko looked at him closely through the crevice. He was so young and beardless, and his eyes burned like fire from the shadow of his hood. From somewhere under his cassock he produced a Testament

and laid it on the table. Upon this he put two daggers crossed, and a revolver on top. He raised a cross in his right hand. The men crossed themselves and repeated slowly after him the oath of unsundering battle:

"While powder burns and blood doth flow——"

CHAPTER II

THE MONK-MAIDEN ON ALLHALLOWMAS

IT WAS full moon on Allhallowmas—unfailing sign of winter-long bad luck for Macedonian shepherds. In the scary twilight, the shacks and sheep-sheds atop the pasture lands of the Seven Well-springs loomed indistinct in outline. The lighted windows of Uncle Tosho's but deepened the enveloping semi-darkness as the eyeglow of the night-owl blackens the shadow that hides the rest of him. Full moon on Allhallowmas; no wonder all cattle were stalled and everything shut and bolted!

In the mud-plastered hut with the lighted windows, the many mouths of Uncle Tosho's household were finishing a late supper of rye bread and sliced onions. To touch meat or milk on Allhallowmas would spoil any shepherd's winter. Green beech-logs and dried cow-manure burned in the fireplace, yielding a light dim but steady. Around the fire the faces stood out clear and distinct from the gloom that wrapped the corners.

"Listen to him, the little scamp!" Mother Yana was chiding a greedy ten-year-old.

"Haven't you had enough plum-brew? You'll burst afore morning, sonny, if you don't stop."

"Try some of Manio's mixture on him, Mother," Toshō suggested, and Yana laughed.

"What about Manio's mixture?" several voices asked. Manio was the new night-watchman, a stocky old shepherd and a good enough worker, but greedier than a priest, and dry as a sponge.

"Why, before that old barrel came to us, he was on the Yellow Pasture sheds across the valley. It was a cattleman from over there told me this story. Manio, I guess, likes plum-brew better than anything else that comes in kettles, and that cattleman is an old hand at brewing the stuff. I've drunk some of his juice; dripped like cream and stuck to my mustache. George, that is the fellow's name, liked it best cold in the morning, so before he'd turn in he'd hang his kettle on a hook outside the hut.

"Manio, the old rascal, noticed him do it. One night he waited until George and the rest were all snoring like slaughtered pigs, took the kettle down and loaded up to the nose. Then he poured in some fresh water, stirred it all up and hung the kettle on the hook as before.

"Next morning George imagined the brew didn't taste as thick as usual, but thought no more of it. He brewed him a fresh kettleful that afternoon and made it richer than ever. Manio laughed in his sleeve and tried the same

trick again. That must have happened several nights running, for finally George caught on. So what do you suppose he did?

"He set the kettle a-boiling, but instead of putting in black plums, he chopped up a lot of tobacco-leaves—that hot, biting kind we cure sheepskins with, and the Tartars smoke. It crackles in their long pipes as a handful of sea-salt does when you throw it in the fire. George mixed that with a lot of chimney-soot to give it color, spiced and seasoned it with a bunch of white wool scissored fine and with crushed Albanian peppers, and let the whole thing simmer for a couple of hours so that all the poison and bitterness came out and made the juice fit to kill at sight. Then he hung it on the hook as usual.

"That happened to be a right busy night for Manio. A couple of cows had strayed and he had been chasing them all over the mountain since sundown. Long after midnight he came, tired and thirsty as a dog. He listened a while to make sure every one was asleep. George snored away in great style. Manio took the kettle down and, thirsty as he was, must have gulped half an *oke*-measure at least before he realized he was drinking fire-poison.

"The next day he couldn't drag himself a step. George even thought he'd have to call Priest Azarias, but the rascal survived. He couldn't stand the Yellow Pasture men's gibes,

though, so he came over here. I haven't noticed our plum-brew getting thinner, either."

"That's a nasty Turk's trick, I say," a girl's voice sounded from the other side of the fire.

"What, Irina, filling the fellow full of tobacco-juice and Albanian peppers?" Tosho laughed.

"No, that was clever. I mean drinking up the plum-brew. Only, a Turk wouldn't have poured in the fresh water."

The back door burst open and Manio himself rushed in, shrieking with terror and gesticulating wildly.

"Holy Saint Petk'a and Saint Nedelia preserve us all! There is a two-headed horse by the sheep-gate, smoking a pipe with one mouth and drinking with the other!"

"By the sheep-gate?" Tosho swore. "That's where I saw you throwing the soapsuds the other day, Yana. I've told you a hundred dozen times: Soap-suds are an invite to goblins and dead men's ghosts and vampires; soap-suds and graveyard willow-twigs and mud from dry wells. We'll be having the spooks set a camp hereabouts if you women don't use your heads."

"Sit down, Manio!" Yana turned to the watchman. Yana was a kind soul. "Sit down and collect your senses, then go and chase the monster off our pastures. Like as not he is across the valley by this time. Ghosts are restless on Allhallowmas."

"It is the full moon does it," Manio reasoned. "It rouses Moslem ghosts as sure as witches' potion. The full moon makes them all a-wander, because no Christian prayers are read for their peace."

After a while he added sagely, "I believe that horse must have been a turncoat Pomak Bulgar. Real Turks always change into hogs."

"Manio, you don't really believe this nonsense, do you?" Irina asked laughingly.

"Believe it? Why, lassie, Deacon Panteleimon heard a priest of the mountain-villages say he had listened to the Abbot of Saint Mitrophan the Stammerer telling the Bishop of Stara Zagora a story handed down by a hermit on his dying bed to the holy monks of Sveta Gora and Hilandar. Some peasants had been hunting in the woods where he was—that is, the Abbot; no, I mean the hermit—and killed a boar that was as big as a bull almost. They skinned him in a hurry and speared him over a fire. But the longer the wild hog roasted, the tougher he got. That made the peasants suspicious, so they examined the carcass—and what do you suppose they found?"

Manio's voice grew mysterious. "I am not asking you to believe *me*. It's what the peasants told the holy hermit-man. On one of the boar's hoofs they found a gold seal-ring that was afterward recognized as having belonged to a Turk, Chaush Bey, who had died in the woods not long before. Chaush had torn it from a miller's

daughter, who had worn it on a string about her neck as a talisman."

All had been silent while Manio was spinning his yarn. Now that he was through, the ten-year-old nestled closer to his mother and burst out crying.

"Manio, you've found the worst time of the year to be telling scary stories," Mother Yana rebuked him. "Here, have some brew and go back to your watching."

"Mind you bolt the outer gate tight," Tosho cried after him. "Dead men's ghosts are bad enough if your belly is empty or too full, but it is live ones that lead cattle out of the stalls in the dead of night when the watchmen don't keep their eyes open."

"Here," he called him back. "Have any of those Turkish soldiers been prowling about this evening?"

"Not since those two that came after cheese and bread at sundown. But, Tosho, I can't take my oath on it, yet I think I heard firing somewhere down toward the Krividol Gulch. I can't be sure, but I think I did."

"Bolt the gate and have your rifle ready," said Tosho.

"I wish Ivan were here," the old shepherd continued. "The son should not have gone hunting this time of year and left us alone like this. There are all sorts of rascals abroad, and my arm doesn't hit as hard as it used to. Shut

every window tight, Yana, and leave the candle burning. I'll cover up the fire."

Manio set out in the night, visiting shed after shed. The watch-dogs growled their recognition as he walked past. All of a sudden Manio stopped, transfixed with superstitious fear. This time he could not doubt his vision. Beyond the outermost shed, by the Sweetheart's Well-spring, he could see plainly a real goblin-maiden on horseback, her hair flying in the wind and her eyes burning like moor-lights. He could hear the impatient tramping of her horse as she brought him quickly to a halt and alighted.

Manio crept noiselessly behind a shed-door and peeped through a crevice, his teeth chattering until he was sure they would betray his presence. What he saw was more marvelous than any abbot's tale. The goblin-maiden seemed not more than five elbow-lengths away. In the full moonlight her face was the face of a young girl, but white as death. She knelt beside the spring, filled a bucketful and gave her horse a drink; drank herself, patted the horse, filled another bucketful, walked a few steps, and sat down on the dewy grass.

Manio noticed that she limped badly. She unwound the sandal-strings, unwrapped her white leggings and began bathing her foot and leg.

The watchman pinched himself to make sure he was not "seeing things." They would never believe him in the morning! They would only

laugh at his tale. If only Uncle Tosho were here to see for himself!

From a bag she carried, the maid took out what looked like a jar of ointment, and for some time rubbed it up and down from her foot to her knee. Then she wrapped the legging about her ankle, tied something very hard above her knee, wound the sandal-strings around, rose and walked gingerly up and down.

She stopped as if to listen. Manio also listened, and seemed to hear the peal of distant thunder. The sky over the mountain was starless now, black with threatening clouds. The air rustled with the chill that goes before a Balkan thunder-storm.

What he saw by the spring, however, made him grit his teeth to keep them from rattling. The shepherd dared not breathe, but silently crossed himself as a saintly hermit does when he sees unsaintly visions. Wonder followed wonder right before his very eyes. The maiden was disrobing.

With all his curious superstition, Manio had the Macedonian peasant's crude modesty, and his eyes closed of themselves—only to open again in fearsome marvel. Where he had seen a goblin-maiden, he now saw a young, beardless monk in cassock, with baggy pantaloons and a heavy waistband from which protruded pistols and daggers, and a belt of bullets slung over the shoulder. The brigand, monk, maiden, goblin, or whatever it was, fastened its belt tighter about

its waist, and proceeded to put up its hair. Something snapped, and Manio saw a monk's black cap on its head. It went to the spring again, gave its horse another drink, once more looked carefully about, then with one leap was astride and away.

Manio mumbled his prayers and continued to cross himself. He could hear distinctly the sudden storm thundering in the uplands, but he kept staring in the direction where the horse had vanished. The first cold drops on his nose stung him to consciousness, and he hastened to bar and bolt everything and hide under cover

CHAPTER III

A MATIN INTERRUPTED

IN a hermit's cell up the Great Divide of the Pirin Mountains, where only rooks and eagles abound, above village and hamlet and shepherd's hut—as near heaven as a Balkan man can get with his feet still on Mother Earth—Brother Boyan was saying his early matins.

Outside, the forest-clad mountain-land shook and roared with the roar of a Balkan thunder-storm. The morning had changed the black darkness into leaden gray, but the mad elements without lent only peace to the ascetic quiet within. Wax candles nodded before a lithographed Virgin and a wood-carven image of Saint John of Rilla. The young anchorite, clad in a simple black homespun cassock, bareheaded and bare-foot, shivering, chattered his teeth through the order of his discipline, absorbed in self-imposed ordeal and genuflection, utterly oblivious of the raging storm outside.

Brother Boyan was just beginning the Sixth Beatitude of the Holy Virgin, when suddenly he stopped short; listened astonished. Was it the

Evil One on Allhallowtide seeking to distract him? He took up his prayer again. No, surely it was a groan, a sobbing human cry he heard. He laid the rosary on the shelf before the icon, stepped to the narrow opening between the rocks that served for an entrance, and looked out.

In the foggy gray of the rain-pour he could distinguish a dim shape that looked like a horse. Evidently an exhausted rider. But what could a rider be seeking atop the Divide?

The hermit returned quickly to the Virgin, crossed himself and kissed the cross, then threw a wheat-sack about his shoulders and rushed out into the storm.

It was a horse, riderless and tramping with fright. Brother Boyan peered about him. Ten feet away he saw a human form crumpled up at the foot of a pine-tree.

"God have mercy on us!" he muttered as he bent over the motionless body.

It was clad in a cassock; the black cap had rolled onto the ground. For a moment the hermit feared he had come too late. But the body shivered as he lifted it in his arms, and, as the head dropped limply on his shoulder, he could feel the faint, irregular breathing.

It was a light burden, he thought. As he laid it on the bearskin cover of his simple couch, a mass of dark hair fell over the pillow.

The hermit went to the inside of the cave, re-

turning presently with a flask which he applied to the half-open lips, at the same time unclasping the soaking wet cassock. Beneath the monk's garb Brother Boyan saw what even his eremite eyes could not fail to recognize as a peasant girl's jacket, in spite of a belt of bullets strapped over the shoulder!

With an ascetic shiver he drew aside. The human shape before him shuddered slightly, as if to rise. Two eyes blinked, opened—the eyes of a woman—and Boyan heard the weak sound of a voice that never came from a monk's throat:

“Did they get away? Dobry, did they?”

The eyes closed again and the girl lay limp on the bed.

Brother Boyan was too good a man to let the sentimental shock of his discovery blind his hermit eyes to the need of immediate help. He applied the flask again to the girl's lips, took off the belt of bullets, loosened her jacket at the neck and undid her hair completely, then wrapped the bearskin and a couple of coarse blankets about the shivering body, and went to the interior of the cell for fire-wood.

He lighted the pile of pine-branches and dry logs with the wax-candle that glimmered before the icon, repeating a prayer while the flames leaped joyously from twig to twig. In a few minutes the dismal cold of the cave had vanished in the bright warmth. Brother Boyan approached the unconscious girl again. Unable to move the

couch itself—merely a rock ledge near the wall of the cave—he drew a heavy shepherd's ground-cloth and laid it before the fire. Then he hesitantly turned to the girl; but the ascetic in him was loath to approach her.

“Mother of Jesus!” he whispered, crossed himself before the icon, and reverently touched the lithographed sanctity with his lips. Even now he dared not touch the girl. He wrapped the blankets about her, and thus carried her clumsily across the cave and laid her down, face toward the fire.

Brother Boyan was a young hermit. His ascetic fervor was the more ardent because of the unquenched susceptibility of youth. The girl's cold, wet garments were as a mantle of death about her, he knew, and yet he could not summon woman's aid. In front of that fire, he thought, she would soon be dry. He piled wood upon the blazing mass, pushed aside the stone overhead, so as to widen the opening that served as a chimney, and stood looking at the icon.

Who could tell? Perhaps this was all a testing of him, an anchorite's temptation. He had read of such lures in the holy books of Saint John of Rilla: of temptresses sent to eremites by the Great Tempter.

He must watch and pray.

He prayed without watching. But the fire-warmed garments steamed up from the prostrate girl. A groan escaped her lips. Accidentally the

hermit glanced at his hands; they were blood-stained.

With a cry of pity he was at her side. The gray blanket at her feet, he now noticed in the fire-glow, was spotted with blood. The left leg of the baggy pantaloons, which combined strangely with the peasant-girl's jacket, was soaked with blood, and sticky. She trembled all over as he touched it. There was an ugly bullet-wound on her knee just below the joint.

An ineffective bandage tied in a knot had checked the blood-flow only partially. Brother Boyan tried to unfasten it, but his hands felt as wooden sticks. At last he took a knife and cut the knot loose. Tearing a towel into strips, he soaked it with whisky and washed the wound clean. The bullet had evidently shot right through, just missing the bone.

With some difficulty he stopped the blood and bandaged the wound as best he could. He wiped the blood from her clothes, noting with satisfaction that they were getting dry, and rubbed her head and hair with a dry cloth. He listened to her breathing. The girl, who had trembled violently while he was cleaning the wound, now lay motionless, fast asleep.

He turned her about with gentle clumsiness, so that her back could dry, took one of the blankets and warmed it before the fire, wrapped her well and put his only pillow under her head. Then, stirring up the fire, he knelt once more before

the Virgin, and took up the Sixth Beatitude where he had left off.

Outside the rain poured as madly as ever, but it had stopped thundering. Brother Boyan tried stubbornly to continue his ritual, repeating prayer after prayer, but he found himself listening to his mumbling lips. His mind kept returning to the girl sleeping by the fireside. *Matin* was impossible.

She was a guest from a world he had scorned and forever abandoned, but she was the messenger of a mystery. Brother Boyan thought he had conquered his senses; his imagination remained, as yawning an abyss as ever. Who was she? What was she? What had brought her to this out-of-the-way cell in the teeth of a Balkan rain-storm, parading in a monk's cassock, brigand's pantaloons, and a peasant-girl's jacket? Whose bullet had pierced her knee, and had it been intended for her, and why? Who was Dobry; and who were "they" about whose capture she worried?

All at once he thought of the horse, which he had forgotten completely in his anxiety about her. He snatched the wheat-sack by way of rain-cloak and, forgetting to kiss the icon this time, rushed out into the rain.

He found little trace of it. After some close search, however, he saw horse's hoof-prints leading down the steep path by the gully. He followed for half an hour or more. They ended at

a slippery turn on the narrow goat-path. Brother Boyan peered down the gorge, but though he saw every mark of the animal's fall on the sheer bank, he could see nothing at the bottom, but the rain-drunken Ladna River roaring down its course, with trees uprooted floating on the crest of the waves. By that time, with such a swift current, the animal's carcass must have reached the valley.

And there was a woman lying wounded in his cave with a badly shot knee, perhaps feverish, half a day's journey from a living soul, separated from a sinful world by a now unfordable, mad current. His wood supply was meager. He must collect more fuel. As he turned back, a thousand thoughts and new worries clashed in his mind, and the blinding rain beat upon his wheat-sack and bathed his set face.

CHAPTER IV

TWO VIRGINS

WHEN he returned, she was tossing restlessly in her sleep. The flush of fever burned in her face. It worried the anchorite, but he felt of her garments, and found them quite dry. Doubtless her fever was the reaction from the night's exposure and the rain and the loss of blood. He mumbled a prayer before Saint John of Rilla's wood-carven image—Saint John himself had the fever once—and threw a fresh log over the fire.

A great boulder had rolled corner-wise into the mouth of the cave, and, shutting off most of what would otherwise have been a wide front, had divided the interior in two. The larger of the two openings thus left served as the hermit's cell; the smaller,—it was so narrow that a human form could scarcely eel through,—led to the inner part of the cavern, and around the rough edge of the boulder to the other side of the cliff. The lighted part of this interior provided Boyan with a pantry. He stepped in, promptly emerging with a basket of not overfresh vegetables, and a small

kettle. He filled the kettle with water, hung it on the iron hook over the blaze, and dropped the vegetables into it. Surely a soup would be good for his patient.

The fire crackled merrily. A spark flew out and fell on the coarse blanket. Boyan stooped quickly to brush it off. Her hand lay on the cover and his own touched it for an instant. Was it the fever that made the touch so fiery? The hermit laid his fingers gently on her forehead. It certainly was hot, and the coolness of his hand seemed to soothe her. He remembered a time in his adolescence when a fever was consuming him; how he had craved nothing so much as freezing water.

The spring by the cave flowed down icy-cold. Boyan dipped a gourdful and carried it back to her side. He soaked a towel and laid it over her head. The girl shivered, half opened her eyes, then sank back with a sigh of relief. Presently her tossing ceased, her breathing grew more regular, and she dropped into a quiet sleep.

The hermit watched her in silence, cooling the towels from time to time, but she did not waken.

Boyan's massive build breathed unspent animal vigor which ill accorded with the ascetic frame in which it had been encased. The stalwart physique seemed destined to be the flaming torch of an avenging nation, not a candle of self-effacing piety. One wondered how prayers and humble supplications could issue from that throat, proud

and firm and chiseled out of living rock; how those knees could bend in meditation. His whole being—Herculean frame, wild waving hair dyed in midnight, eyes of untamed fire—proclaimed him a lord of battle. Yet a mantle of humility enveloped the man, and the very strength of him made the hermit more defiantly astatic as he bent over the sleeping woman, ministering to her needs like the good Samaritan of a Pirin parable.

The odor of scorched vegetables brought him to himself. He sprang up and took the kettle off the fire. She was still sleeping soundly. Surely she needed food more than sleep. He wondered what he could do to waken her. She should be aroused gently in a way not to alarm her.

A quaint thought came into his head. Clearing his throat, the hermit began a low, liturgic chant. The first notes fell strangely out of tune, and he broke off into an uneasy laugh. The presence of another, and that other a woman, made him shy even of his own voice.

A cloud passed over her face, she turned slightly in his direction.

"Don't laugh," she ordered. "I want to sleep," and sank back.

He stared at her anxiously. She must be utterly exhausted, and still unconscious of where she was. Her condition moved him to pity. She was helpless. He realized suddenly that she would probably be so for some time. It was long past noon. The sun had just reached the sheer cliffs

of Vishny Peak, and the pines on the lower reaches of the mountain threw the valley to the east in the shadow of approaching even.

An unuttered thought it was, or perhaps only a mood, but it shocked the soul of the eremite as his eyes surveyed the bareness of his rocky cell and rested on the woman sleeping before his fire. He crossed himself almost guiltily, his lips murmuring a "*Gospody pomiluy*" [God have mercy on us]. He had completely neglected his ritual, but this was no time for devotions. "Inasmuch as ye have done it to the least of these," he kept repeating. The host in him subdued the ascetic. Man or woman, here she was in his cave. He must get things comfortable for the night.

The bald peaks all about him glowed in the mellow sunlight and the woodland rustled contentedly. The clear air set Boyan's blood a-tingle. He wielded his heavy knife lustily. His greedy eyes sought for the softest twigs of balsam and hemlock; and as the fragrant pile at his feet grew, a strange gladness crept within him. The body he had hoped to kill thrilled with a new, joyous life.

The noonday sun had dried the soft pine-branches, but he warmed them before the fire to make sure. The wall of the cave opposite the fire receded into an alcove. Boyan spread his fresh twigs carefully, threw his only sheepskin cover on them and, by way of curtaining off the improvised chamber, he stretched a blanket in

front. Then he stood back to admire the effect. The partition was quite successful. As he stepped into the alcove and pressed the balsam-couch to test its springiness, his eyes danced with boyish satisfaction.

"Oh!"

The exclamation brought him to his feet. He threw back the curtain and stepped out. She was awake at last, intensely awake and staring about her wide-eyed. He tried to speak quietly:

"You have slept long."

Her dark, gray-brown eyes searched his face keenly; she struggled to get to her feet. But a bend of the knee sent a tremor of agony through her. She reeled forward and almost fell into his arms as he sprang to help her.

"Do sit down," he said. "You are weak; you need food."

He swung the long-neglected kettle over the fire, and brought out a loaf of bread and some cheese. When the vegetables once more simmered, he put the kettle between them on a high stone and folded a wheat-sack for her to sit on.

She watched him curiously, questioningly, as he moved about, but neither ventured any conversation. He motioned her to sit down, smiling whimsically at the warmed-over soup.

"This is no sort of dinner for Allhallowtide," he said, "but it is the best I have." Then, as he uncovered the kettle, "The mess has waited long. You were a heavy sleeper."

She sat up with an effort, but without demur, for she was evidently weak with hunger. They ate almost greedily. She could feel strength coming to her with every mouthful.

"Will you tell me, Holy Brother," she turned to him, "when did I come here, and how?"

"You came in the gray dawn," he answered. "How, the Blessed Virgin only knows. Your horse lost his footing on the Ladna cliffs half an hour's distance from here, and fell in the river."

She shuddered.

"And you? And this cave?"

"I am one who seeks peace with God and the lone eagles up here. You are still in this stone cave because there is no help nearer at hand than half a day's journey."

She passed her hand over her forehead.

"I remember climbing and climbing. Then I could ride no more, and the storm beat me from the saddle." She touched her bandaged knee. "You have been very good," she added uncertainly.

He flushed and stammered in embarrassment.

"There was no one else here to do it."

She gave him another direct look.

"You *are* very good," she concluded.

Once more silence ensued. She bent her head and watched him intently, as though she would read every letter of his thought.

"Tell me; has there been any one else—following—I mean here—looking for me?"

There was more anxiety than eagerness in her voice. All the questions and conjectures of the morning returned to him as he looked at her tense features.

"There has been no one," he answered. "Only the peace of God can draw a man up this goat-path. The road of men is five hours distant down the valley."

"Are you always alone here?"

"Ivan the Huntsman is my only guest, and he has not been here these many days."

"Ivan the Huntsman? And he is"—she considered a moment, then finished—"the first-born of old Tosho of the Seven Well-springs?"

Her concern astonished him. Who was she? Surely not a village-girl, yet how did she know Ivan, who scorned women and cared only for the rocks and chasms of the Balkan uplands? He nodded in assent:

"He is Tosho's son," he answered. "He used to bring me gifts from the Seven Well-springs, but of late he has forgotten, and I have had to go down to the sheep-sheds myself."

"You—you go to Tosho's for supplies?"

She leaned across the stone table in her eagerness. "Is it far?"

"Three rocky hours down the cliff-trail on a dry day. It is more than a day's journey now."

"Oh!" she almost moaned and sank back wearily, stretching her foot toward the fire.

He waited for her to speak further, but she

watched the coals in silence. The sunset-lighted pines in the west burned quickly to ashy twilight; veiled in filmy dusk, forest and cliff vanished in indistinct outline or grew into phantom shapes, desolate, portentous. A mystic, incoherent rustle swallowed up the thousand jolly chirps and crackles of a Pirin woodland day, and an odor of dark brown earth and damp-rotting leaves rose from the ground and penetrated every nook and crevice. Night had closed over the mountains. Dark night enveloped them on all sides, save for the drowsy glow of the dying coals on the hearth. At length he rose.

"There is—a bed—of balsam boughs," he mumbled. "I have curtained it off as best I could."

She looked up and around her. Outside the cave-mouth she could see the blackness of the night and hear the moaning of the night wind. A realization of their utter solitude came over her in a flood.

"No, no!" she cried. "I shall stay here in the light. I do not care for sleep."

He flushed again.

"You are weak and need rest," he said in a hurt tone. "You are safe, you need have no fear of me."

He bowed his head and crossed himself reverently.

"I am a man seeking peace with God on High," he insisted.

She struggled to stand up, but the hermit looked down and made no offer of help. She limped painfully toward the curtain, and before she pushed it aside turned to him once more.

He looked up. The firelight played on her face, and long, dark tresses fell in disorder over her shoulders. Her eyes smiled frankly across the fire.

"I trust you," the girl said simply; then added, half whimsically:

"You say you are a man seeking peace with God. I am a woman seeking peace for men."

The curtain dropped behind her. Boyan stood motionless, staring at the place where she had disappeared. When he knelt at his devotions before the Holy Virgin, the blue eyes of the image reflected a grayish-brown light that smiled at him with reflected firelight, and puzzling words obstructed the prayer he was repeating, and followed him into his dreams.

CHAPTER V

MIRKO RECONNOITERS

MIRKO had waited in front of the studio until his very teeth chattered with nervous impatience. He could hear his brother's deep breathing, and only the memory of former cudgelings kept him from wakening the sleeper.

The twelve-year-old had been slipping up and down the corridor-balcony all night, it seemed, waiting, waiting, and watching. It was almost gray in the east before Dobry came and, though Mirko tumbled off into a restless sleep after that, he dreamed so vividly that he felt quite as if he had been awake. The first ray of sunlight which shot over his face wakened him crying:

"Dobry, Dobry, they're after me! They're catching up with me, Dobry! I didn't steal anything!"

"The devil's hoofs always leave a trail, sonny!"

Aunt Zora stood in the doorway, pointing an accusing finger at the crumbs of some sugar-fried wheat-shreds on a chair by the bed.

"Of course you'll have dreams when you steal food like that and gobble it up under your blanket. Out with you now, you little grasshopper, and run to Abraham the Jew's for a bag of sugar, or I'll tell Dobry on you."

Mirko rolled out, dressed, and was on the street before his aunt had reached the kitchen. There was a strange stir; people were running here and there or standing in groups at the corners, waving their hands excitedly. For once in his life Mirko had no curiosity, but sped straight for the Jew's store. Turning the corner he ran squarely into a lad of his own age.

"Mirko, Mirkitchko, have you heard?" the boy cried, too excited to resent his tumble. "Think of all that money!"

Mirko's knees almost gave way under him.

"Did they do it really?" he gasped, off his guard. "And wasn't any one hurt?"

"They got away," the boy answered, "and all the Turkish *zaptiehs* [guards] were killed but one."

"Where did you learn all this, Snubby-nose?"

"From that longbeard over at the corner. The one guard who got away told the Pasha it was a band of Turkish soldiers who hadn't had any pay that did it. But I don't believe that, even if the Pasha does."

He came nearer, laying his forefinger impressively on Mirko's arm.

"I believe those fellows were real brigands,

Mirko, the kind Granny sings about—a whole band of *haidutes*. Say, Mirko, wouldn't it be great to be a *haidute*! Let's go to the market and hear what they are saying there."

But Mirko curbed his curiosity.

"I daren't," he said. "Got to bring Aunt Zora's sugar. She's mad as seven hens with me now because I hooked her wheat-shreds last night."

And, shaking himself off, he ran at full speed for the Jew's store.

A busy-looking place it certainly was, and an apparently prosperous one. Baskets of eggs and sheepskins of salted dairy butter, sacks of wheat, and large greasy cases of *kashkaval* cheese filled every available inch of floor-space. On the shelves behind the counter were stacked the one hundred and seventeen manufactured articles which the peasant requires.

The curious thing about it was the almost complete absence of money in the business transacted. Village women with baskets of eggs came in through one door, and went out of another with bottles and jars and packages. Peasants brought in wheat and cheese and butter; they took away olive-oil and bags of salt, sugar and pruning-knives.

That they sold at wholesale and bought at retail seemed to worry them little. Abraham's was the only place in Gorenno selling what they needed, and, had they insisted on a money medium, they

would have returned with even less in their baskets and wagons. Meanwhile Abraham had an oily tongue, and a better house than any Bulgar in town.

Mirko edged his way to the counter and was trying to catch the Jew's eye and order his sugar, when a hairy hand caressed his face rather roughly and pushed him aside.

"My, my," Mirko heard an old voice cackle, "the young ones to-day certainly push themselves ahead and don't show much respect for white hairs. Wait a bit, sonny, don't act like an unmannered gipsy-boy."

Mirko slunk back, quite shamed. Contrary to his first impression, however, no one else seemed to have heard the old man's censure or to be paying any attention to the incident; and by and by the lad gathered up courage to glance up at the graybeard, who was waving his hand at the busy storekeeper.

It was Zasho Doeff, the old shepherd. He "had heard something," he kept repeating to everybody, so he had hitched up, with three pounds of butter on board, to "find out."

"They say, Abraham——"

"Let them say, Uncle,—what did you say you wanted this morning?"

"There is some goods coming to me from last time, and here's a pot of butter. I need a scythe-grinder, Abraham, and Lada, my old woman, she wanted some straining cheesecloth for the milk.

Yes, Abraham, I heard they had got a pot of money out near Krividol somewhere; thousands of golden liras, all the Sultan's taxes; what do you think, Abraham?"

Abraham sniffed. "Here's your cheesecloth and your grinder, Uncle,—and, Uncle," he said, "here is some cotton-wool. Stuff your ears with it: they'll be better off if they do not hear so much. Good day, Uncle.—You want something, little boy?" He turned to Mirko.

"Your brother is tired and sleepy this morning," Aunt Zora told the lad when he returned. "Eat your breakfast alone. I am not hungry."

Mirko broke his bread into his red earthen milk-bowl and stirred it up with his wooden spoon, but he could not eat. The moment Aunt Zora left him alone in the room, he tiptoed to the studio and listened intently at Dobry's bedroom-door. He waited for a sign of waking, but his big brother still snored on. How *could* he sleep when all Goreno was agog with the awful news of the robbery in the mountains?

Once more Mirko stole along the balcony, through the court, and down the street. He would go to the market and learn what the Pasha really believed. His small body felt almost bursting with the secret he held. And Snubby-nose thought he knew a lot about it, while he, Mirko, had actually heard them, seen the young, beardless monk——

The streets were buzzing with excitement just

as before, but Mirko noticed that the men he met seemed to be on the lookout for Turkish *zaptiehs*. He heard an elderly peasant say that sensible folks kept under cover when trouble was abroad.

Still, even fear could not check their curiosity.

"What will Murad Pasha do for his money now?" a graybeard speculated. "Collect our year's taxes yet another time?"

"How can he?" objected a young man who had just been married. "There is hardly an extra piaster among us."

"We mint piasters from our finger-nails when Murad Pasha speaks," the old man answered. "Come, let's hear what Stoyan the Chandler thinks. He is always a man of ideas."

Mirko twisted his bare toes into the cracks of the cobblestones. Stoyan the Chandler had been at the studio that night. A panicky idea struck him. What if some one wanted to talk to Dobry and found him asleep? It seemed to the boy that would be positive proof of his brother's guilt. Dobry must be awakened at all costs. Mirko rushed back home, ran along the balcony and pounded excitedly at the bedroom-door.

"Out with you, you crickety scamp," his brother roared at him. "I'll tan your hide till it looks like Turkish leather if you don't leave me alone."

But Mirko pounded on unheeding.

"Dobry, *Bati*, [Brother] Dobry," he panted between knocks. "You must get up. The Turks

have found out——” Then he realized he must not give himself away. “I mean, I heard—Murad Pasha’s money—all the taxes—Turkish soldiers have stolen them. You mustn’t let them find you here sleeping, Brother.”

Dobry was awake in earnest as he opened the door. He was but half undressed, and his face was streaked with markings of charcoal partially washed off. The room behind him was in utter disorder, and a peculiar odor of burned cloth pervaded it. On the hearth before the fireplace Mirko saw the half-burned tassel of a Turkish fez. He pulled at Dobry’s thumb excitedly.

“Do hurry, Dobry. Can’t you hurry?” he pleaded.

“Be quiet, you little chip of nonsense,” his brother answered, though not as crossly as before. “What is the matter with you? Tell me, what’s all this stuff you are prating?”

Dobry was speaking calmly, but Mirko could see how tense his muscles were.

“Why, they’ve stolen the Pasha’s money, the taxes, you know. Some men waylaid the wagon at the Krividol Gulch and went off with the whole wagon-load. The Pasha thinks Turkish deserters did it, that’s what they all say on the street, but Kolio, that little snubby-nose, you know, says he believes it was *haidutes*. Say, brother, was it *haidutes*?”

Dobry laughed, but somewhat uneasily.

“The little goblins of Allhallows take you,

Mirko, how do I know? Go tell Aunt Zora I want a broiled ox for breakfast. And listen," he added as the lad started, "just hang about the court, won't you, and let me know a little ahead if any one calls around. I want to straighten this place up a bit."

Mirko patrolled the court and street-entrance like a sentinel. If Dobry only knew how much of the inside of the matter Mirko understood, wouldn't he pull his ears for him! Still, the little chap thought, nobody would ever get that secret out of him. He wondered how it had all been done. Had Dobry *really*——?

He wondered about it until his thirst for information sent him back to the studio. When he entered, the room was in order and Dobry stood before his easel slapping paint at an icon of Saint George killing a fiery red dragon, with the little princess fleeing away in the background. Mirko stretched on the floor, began playing with the paint-tubes, and, unable to restrain himself longer, burst out:

"How do you suppose they did it, Dobry? Was it pitch-dark, and did you ride down the path and——"

His brother cut him short.

"The best thing you can learn, Mirko, is to keep your hands off those paints and your mouth padlocked. When a twelve-year-old like you——"

The door shook with a heavy knock. Mirko leaped to his feet, and the hair of Dobry's prin-

cess got the stroke of red intended for the dragon's tongue.

"See who it is." Dobry was mixing yellow and green on his palette to get blue. Mirko opened the door and almost screamed in fright. A burly *zaptieh* stepped past him into the studio.

"Murad Pasha wants you at the *konak* [palace] as fast as your feet can carry you."

Dobry looked keenly at the Turk, but saw no light of intelligence there one way or the other. He answered simply:

"Tell the Pasha I shall come at once. And clean your boots next time you go into a decent man's house."

The *zaptieh's* officiousness vanished. He hesitated a moment, then left the room and walked down to the courtyard. Dobry put on his hat and coat coolly, deliberately. At the door Mirko's tense little figure arrested him. He put his hand kindly on the boy's head.

"Don't worry, little messenger," he said. "Remember just this: keep your ears open and your mouth *shut*. And stay around where you can be found in a twinkling."

The boy nodded and followed his brother along the balcony, down to the street-door. He watched him stride down the street with a mingled feeling of wonder and anxious pride. The *zaptieh* had gone on a short distance ahead; Dobry ignored him utterly.

Anyway, Mirko thought, the Turk had not

dared to boss his brother! He knew, too, that under his coat, carefully concealed in the folds of his red woolen sash, Dobry carried a small, shining revolver. Gathering what comfort he could, the lad crept back into the court, picked out a sunny spot, and watched until sheer weariness sent him to sleep.

CHAPTER VI

A CAREER IN TURKDOM

DOBRY VLADIMIROFF'S father had been the chief *chorbadji* [squire] of the town of Gorenno, and had often taken his son with him when called in by the Pasha to be ordered about on local affairs. The lad had inherited and cultivated a coolness and poise that gave the young man much of his father's prestige when the old *chorbadji* died. Even the Turks treated the young icon-painter with a degree of respect rarely vouchsafed to one of the oppressed race.

He strode nonchalantly along the street, but the Turkish *zaptieh*, keeping half a dozen steps in front of him, had a trick of waiting suspiciously at every street-crossing, until Slavy the Saddler, hobbling a few elbow-lengths behind with a patched donkey-harness slung across his shoulder, could manage his curiosity no longer.

"Whither bound, Dobry?"

"To the palace," Dobry answered. "I'm afraid some one has been cooking the Pasha's porridge in a brass bowl and left nothing much but a bad taste for him."

"We'd better hope there will be any taste at all for us if the Pasha wants his bowl filled again," Slavy remarked.

Stoyan the Chandler stood in his shop-door listening. As Dobry passed, he called to him softly:

"All well, Dobry?"

Dobry raised his eyes significantly.

"Only the Pasha knows," he murmured. "This Abdul," with a contemptuous nod toward the *zaptieh* ahead, "brought me a note to go to the palace immediately. It looks well since he didn't insist on my walking in front of him. Just keep yourself informed at first hand, Stoyan, and let the others know how the land lies. Are our men all about to-day?"

"Oh, yes; all up and going about our business as usual. Of the wagon-guards, only Mahmut seems to have escaped, and he is a fool. You ought to see Gani, though. You know how he played the loyal driver till the very end. Well, I caught sight of him when they marched him across to the palace. He has lumps on his head like duck's eggs, and his nose is broken and big as two. To look at him, he's the most faithful servant old Murad ever had."

"Yes, all are accounted for—except the one who is the most important of all," Dobry said anxiously.

"True," the chandler sighed. "I heard his Holiness cry out when they shot him. He shouted

something at Ivan the Huntsman, the name of some place it was, I think, and off he galloped. I do hope he escaped."

"And I *do* hope——" Dobry began, but the *zaptieh* turned inquisitively. The icon-painter finished in a whisper, "If his wound was light, all's well; Ivan's men must have hidden the haul by now."

Dobry raised his voice for Abdul's benefit.

"We've used about all our candles and need another dozen. Mirko may call on you this afternoon."

The pebble-paved courtyard before Murad Pasha's palace was filled with excited villagers and wolfish, sullen soldiers. It was market-day, and the rough sheepskins of the mountaineers and shepherds scratched the gaily dyed homespun of the townsmen.

Dobry squeezed and elbowed his way through the crowd. Here and there some one called to him; and he waved his *kalpak* with easy grace and went up the steps of the palace. The Turkish guards moved aside for him and he passed down the long corridor to the audience-chamber. Abdul himself opened the door and announced his arrival.

The room was long and narrow. Broad, low, thick-cushioned divans skirted the walls, broken with heavily paneled, dingy windows very close to the ceiling. There were no tables in the room and no chairs, except a three-legged stool. In

the middle a large polished brazier glowed with red-hot coals, and several iron bars of ominous size were heating in it.

Half a dozen Turkish officers sprawled over the divans in attitudes of officious *ennui*; at the top of the room, Murad Pasha toasted his lordly shins before a smaller brazier, pulled importantly at his *nargileh* and grunted sulkily at some intangible fate that seemed to be disturbing his equanimity.

Murad was a fair example of a type of provincial governor not uncommon in Macedonia. His rise from nothing to official dignity had been rapid and characteristic, but hardly anyone knew in detail the checkered and romantic career of his youth.

His mother's husband, once a prosperous Constantinople Greek dealing in rice, had failed in business, and had been obliged to sell his store and house to a Mohammedan Albanian in charge of the fire department at the Ministry of Police, only to be robbed of the price a short week after he had received it. The Albanian, attracted by the beauty of the wife, had interested himself in the husband to the extent of appointing him a fireman. But the novice at the business took his duties so seriously that at a big fire in a Stamboul vintner's shop, he managed to save a barrel of wine instead of saving his skin.

The widow, left alone, and thrown upon her own resources, found herself at first welcoming

the Albanian's help, then suspecting and for a long time resisting his advances, and finally resigning herself to her fate. Two years after the death of her husband, the birth of her first child, Lambro, made her a social outcast among her Greek neighbors, and also cooled the Mohammedan's passion for her. His wife, the daughter of his official superior, was too insanely jealous to allow any additions to his harem, and he satisfied himself with helping the mother for a while, until his removal to Smyrna deprived her of all means of support.

Abandoned on all sides, the poor woman fared badly enough, until her beauty, in which there still lingered something of the old freshness, impressed Father Dionisios, priest at the Greek church where, in her plight, she worshipped devotedly. Through his help she moved to another part of the city, where she could obtain alms and occasional employment while the boy grew up. A clever lad, and handsome as a girl, he soon became a fairly successful peddler of fruits and sweetmeats, and his mother began to breathe more freely. Father Dionisios paid them not infrequent visits; and, while his warm piety did not preclude occasional caresses, his comforting words made his every appearance a source of joy to the mother.

One night Lambro's troubled sleep attracted his mother's attention, and some words which she caught in his wandering talk worried her so that

she extracted a confession from him in the morning.

It appeared that his fruit-stand was near a large palace-like Turkish house with latticed windows. He had often seen two black eyes gazing at him through an opening in one of the windows, and almost every day a black slave-woman had come to buy cherries and other fruit, always paying him more than he wanted. The previous day he had gone to the fruit-store from which he bought his supplies, and had been delayed until the middle of the afternoon. When he returned, he had found a strange man occupying his accustomed place. Their dispute over the matter had almost arrived at blows, when a carriage came out of the house. The coachman ordered the strange fruit-peddler away; the carriage door opened, and a richly dressed lady, lifting her veil, bought some cherries from him. Her daughter, who was with her, also raised her veil, and the most beautiful face Lambro had ever seen smiled at him; the black eyes which had watched him from behind the lattice twinkled and danced merrily, her dyed finger-nails set off the whiteness of her fingers and hands; and her teeth——

“Mother,” Lambro exclaimed, “her name is Fatma, and she is like a garden of roses. Her mother has made a vow to marry her to a Christian-born, and I could have her for wife if I would turn a Moslem!”

"Turn a Moslem, my boy? What would Father Dionisios say?"

The Father supplied the answer on his next visit, when he heard the particulars, by offering the boy a good position as helper in the church. Lambro wondered how to explain the fatherly care of the priest, who demanded little work from him, yet paid him more than he had been able to earn selling fruit.

Dionisios was priestly-pious even when the two were alone, and the lad half-revered him. But late one evening Lambro saw him emerge from his room dressed in civilian garb, with a large felt hat over his long hair, which he had combed up on the top of his head.

"Lambro," he said impressively, "can I trust you?"

"Yes, Father, unto death," the boy answered.

"Come along, then."

They entered a boat, and Dionisios rowed up the Bosphorus, until they came to Arnaut Keuy, the section where Lambro had plied his fruit-peddling.

"Guard the boat until I come back, Lambro," Dionisios ordered. "You can go to sleep, if you want to,—I have chained and locked the boat to this iron post here."

The youth watched him walk up the dimly lighted street, and wondered where he might be bound, when suddenly he saw the priest, who had

reached a lantern-post, wheel around, as if to see whether he was being followed, and then—turn into a short blind-alley which, Lambro knew, led to a side-door of the palace-like house of his fruit-peddling days!

When the priest roused him from sleep, it was almost dawn. The two rowed back to the church, where the Father swore his helper to secrecy, handing him half a silver *medjidieh* to help out the oath.

These visits were repeated at frequent intervals, and, as the youth became more intimate with his employer, he became less confiding with his mother. Once the sophisticated Lambro went so far as to nudge his Holiness in the ribs, asking him why he had objected to his turning a Moslem and marrying Fatma. The priest laughed.

"Wait until Fatma has to marry you, my son; then you will be sure to get an obedient wife."

Lambro's mother died unexpectedly the following winter, and he was very melancholy, when one day in the spring Father Dionisios was unusually kind. He told Lambro how much he was interested in his future. A Turkish friend of his, named Abdullah Bey, who held an important position as secretary of a Pasha in a big *konak*, wanted an honest Christian boy for assistant, if he would only embrace Islam. It was only a mere form, Dionisios explained, and advised Lambro not to let it stand in his way of preferment.

To be sure, Abdullah Bey would not keep him for a minute if he knew the story of his birth, Dionisios told him, but he would never betray him, of course. In return for all his kindness, the priest said, he requested only a slight service from his protégé. Abdullah slept occasionally in the Pasha's *konak*, where Lambro was to live regularly. Would he send his benefactor a message every time Abdullah Bey announced his intention of not going home for the night? The young fellow readily assented. His intimate acquaintance with the priest had made him cynical in matters of religion, and the thought of Fatma flashed through his mind. Who knew, perhaps——

His new master was a good man, commanding the respect of his associates, but rather ugly of person. Usually he left his desk early in the afternoon, but now and then his work piled up. Then he would send Murad,—the name Lambro had assumed in adopting Islam,—to order supper for him and to prepare his bed in the adjoining room. The young assistant would slip down the street to a Greek wine-shop and send one of the bartenders to carry a flask of some special liquor to Father Dionisios: this was the signal the Moslem convert had arranged with the Christian priest.

Murad's speculations as to the special interest which led Father Dionisios to keep such close track of Abdullah's whereabouts were simplified and complicated one summer day. The Bey had

bought a big basketful of rare Anatolian fruits, and asked Murad to help him carry them home. The young man was astonished to find that his master's residence was the old familiar palace-like house in Arnaut Keuy. Curiously enough, Abdullah's wife pretended not to remember him, but that did not prevent her from treating him most hospitably. Fatma also entered the room; the girl's beauty had grown only more luring, and while she treated him freely, as if he were a harmless boy and she a mere lassie, there was in her attitude a voluptuous suggestiveness which Murad could not misinterpret. For she knew he had turned a Moslem.

Affairs continued thus for some time. One afternoon Abdullah Bey had announced his intention of sleeping in the *konak*, and Murad had duly despatched a messenger to Father Dionisios, when a carriage arrived. A woman-slave entered, informing the Bey that his daughter Fatma had decided to buy that afternoon a precious gem she had long contemplated purchasing, and waited in the carriage for the money. Murad watched his master count out a handful of liras to the slave, after which he instructed her to wait for Murad at the jeweller's on their way back. The carriage rolled off.

Hardly had the Bey bent down to his work again, when a strange man entered and engaged him in some close conversation. The Bey's face paled, his body trembled, and suddenly he turned

to Murad and told him he was going directly home.

"Going home?" Murad cried out. A tone of dismay was in his voice, and Abdullah's suspicions were aroused.

"What is it to you if I go home or not?" he shouted at him. "What are you hiding from me? Speak, or I'll cut you to pieces this minute!"

An ugly dagger soon extracted a full confession. The stranger laughed bitterly.

"I told you so, Abdullah Bey—you will not find your *hanoum* waiting for you when you reach your house."

The Bey shot out of the *konak* like a wild beast, and the stranger followed.

Murad was left alone, stunned by the incident. He saw ruin ahead of him, imprisonment, perhaps worse. Suddenly his eyes caught sight of the money-drawer, which Abdullah Bey, in his excitement, had forgotten to lock. Greedily he opened it: the glitter of the gold, the banknotes of large denominations, held him fascinated for a moment, and then a resistless idea struck him like lightning. He emptied the drawer's wealth into a small leather-bag, slipped out of the *konak*, hailed a cabman, and drove to the jeweller's where Fatma waited with her old nurse. A few words enticed the voluptuous girl to enter his cab. On the train westward, which they boarded at an insignificant station outside of Constantinople, the

conductor accepted a gold piece as a satisfactory answer to his request for a traveling-permit.

But Abdullah Bey's money went faster than the elopers had anticipated. Murad had to look around. In upper Macedonia, where they finally settled, a band of Albanian robbers periodically sacked the Shar villages, paying a fraction of the booty by way of tribute to the Turkish officials, who allowed them free range. Murad now remembered his Albanian descent. The story of his Moslem-fathered birth did not seem to lower him in Fatma's eyes: she wove an Arabian night of love around it, and a local rumor soon credited him with a most valiant Albanian ancestry. He became a go-between, selling the robbers' booty under the very nose of the government. The robbers, thus accommodated, doubled their activities, until finally the exasperated Bulgar natives organized a posse of their own, and in a clash somewhere in the upper reaches of the Vardar River the band was pretty well annihilated.

Then Murad's hour of destiny came. He invited the *vali* of Uskub to dinner. Perhaps Fatma was too modern, and more beautiful than modest, that night, but before the *vali* left the house her husband had been appointed the head of a body of Turkish irregulars. Representing the peasants' uprising as an organized revolt against the Empire, Murad swept over the Shar regions and proceeded to quiet the land. The tastes of Turkish irregulars he quickly learned;

he knew what Bashibozouks wanted; he had found his chance.

The village of Presta had been the center of the peasants' uprising. All the able-bodied men were in the mountains. Murad entered Presta at sundown—at sunup there was no Presta.

It was quick and simple work. Each soldier picked his house: there were three hundred and fifty of them. The old men and children were killed on the spot; the women and girls bound with their girdles and braids of long hair. The houses were then systematically sacked and set afire. About midnight, outside the village, Murad's Bashibozouks piled high their booty around a huge campfire. The wails of the captives mingled sickeningly with the ribald jests and blood-besotted riot of the Turkish gendarmerie.

The story of Presta reached Usküb; a garrulous tongue carried it to Constantinople. Obviously a strong man had appeared in the Shar regions; the dispensers of honors in Turkdom smiled on the efficient pacifier of Christian villages; Murad grew ambitious. A similar exploit of his, with gruesome variations, stirred the Vardar valley near Veles.

About this time Essad Pasha of Goreno was relieved of his office "for lack of resolution." Murad was obviously the sort of man needed, and the next winter saw the one-time fruit-peddler established as Pasha in Goreno.

The sack of Presta and the pacification of the

Veles district had started him on the road to affluence; his elevation to the pasha-rank made the son of the Greek woman at once an epicure and a libertine. Fatma's jealousy kept him from increasing his harem; but Abdullah's daughter aged rapidly. The birth of her first long-expected son, Selim, left her an old woman. Murad was ready to neglect her for any red-cheeked peasant-girl who chanced to pass his way. The Pasha of Goreno became a night-hawk, and at last Fatma's old nurse made bold to advise her that four wives were better than forty mistresses, and asked her to think of her firstborn, whose father was squandering all his substance in dissolute feasting.

Fatma had been the passionate mistress once, the voluptuous wife; she now became the adoring mother. Murad's harem grew, and, with his increased family duties, the Pasha of Goreno improved, if not in morals, at least in domesticity. Occasional escapades, however, served to remind Fatma that Murad the Pasha was as dissolute as Murad the Nobody had been grasping.

But all that was years ago. Sixty-year-old Murad was an apple soft with decay, which preserved a thin surface of solidity only by the most elaborate pomp and lordly mannerisms. The ex-robber sought to convince himself of his undiminished power by building new harems and planning new prisons, but his wits were getting short. A robber in his youth, a libertine in mid-life, Murad vainly tried to be a local divinity in his old age. He had used up his capital.

CHAPTER VII

THE PRIDE OF THE VARDAR

AS Dobry's name was called, the Pasha cleared his throat and drew himself up with self-importance. "Bring him in," he called.

For a moment the Bulgar hesitated. He looked keenly at the officers present, as he always did when entering this room. In spite of the very apparent friendliness of Murad Pasha, Dobry could never forget the stories his father had told him of men who had entered that room and whom no one had seen come out.

His quick glance reassured him, however, and his uneasiness vanished. He bowed low to the Pasha.

"Allah keep your liver sweet this morning, Pride of the Vardar," he recited.

Murad rubbed his tawny hands and nodded in acknowledgment of his favorite compliment.

"It is well you have come at once, Dobry. You suspect why you have been called. You have heard the news?"

"I suspect nothing," Dobry answered, choos-

ing his words. "I get my knowledge from good sources. I await all news from yourself."

"You are your father's son in your speech," Murad commented, and nodded to the *zaptieh* at an inner door. It opened, and two guards escorted a much-bedraggled and shivering Mahmut, and a Gani with two eyes bulging from between the towels that wrapped his head like an Anatolian turban. Dobry could scarcely suppress a smile at the manifest thoroughness of the wagon-driver's make-up.

"Now, Mahmut, out with it. Tell me exactly what happened."

Mahmut shifted his gaze uneasily from one to another of the Turks sprawling over the divans. That he was ashamed of something was doubly apparent when he met Gani's contemptuous stare.

"It was a black night, Beloved of Allah," he began, "and the Krividol Gulch was darker than a dungeon after sunset. The road is wide enough at first, but gets narrower and narrower as it winds up the mountain, until there is just room for a wagon and team. We *zaptiehs* had to divide; six of us went in front and six wound up the rear. When you reach the pass itself, the cliff shoots up one side and a sheer precipice shoots down the other."

"It is not quite that way, Pride of the Vardar," Gani interrupted. "I know that country like the inside of my sandal. There is a ditch between the road and the cliff. I know, because——"

"Hold your tongue until you are asked, you croaking bullfrog," Murad yarred at him. "Do you presume to teach Murad Pasha the lay of his own land? Go on, Mahmut."

A timely kick, administered by one of the guards, assisted Gani to subside.

"If there is a ditch," Mahmut continued, "I didn't see it, but I was one of the last in line and on the side next the Gulch itself. We were hoping the place was almost past. I heard Ismail Effendi ask Gani how much farther it was. Gani—this dog here, Beloved of Allah—answered, 'Just around the bend and over the crest.'

"We were between two bends on a sort of shelf, and I don't remember just how it happened, but all of a sudden I thought the whole side of the cliff was falling over our heads. At the same time a dozen rifles cracked out in front of us and another dozen behind.

"We were caught. It was as clear a trap as you could imagine. We had our rifles ready, of course, just as orders had been, but it's hard to take aim in the dark behind you when you can't turn your horse's head. Ismail, who was just in front of me, turned too quickly and I saw him and his horse go over the precipice together.

"It gave me an idea, and I slid off and let my mare take care of herself. She was one of the first to get shot, and almost crushed me when she fell. Meanwhile the firing kept up in front and some dozen or two dozen men rushed up behind.

It was no use. We yelled and cursed and fought like the Prophet's own soldiery, but they shot the horses from under us.

"How I escaped, Pasha, only Allah can tell. The wagon began to back on us. I saw it coming. The lanterns were dancing up and down. I waited until I saw two of the robbers jump to the seat. Beloved of Allah, they had fezes on, and the rag-and-bag of Ottoman deserters! It was plainly a band from the Uskub troops. Akiff Pasha does not pay his men regularly as you do, and they must have been hungry for plunder.

"I can fight any pack of Christian dogs, Pasha, I can; but what could one man do against Osmanli soldiery? I lay where I was, pretending I was dead, slipped away as soon as I could and ran here at top speed."

"How did it happen, when you were to start early in the morning, that you did not reach the pass until night?"

It was Dobry who asked the question. The Pasha looked at Gani.

"Answer that, you lazy-horned spawn of a snail," he cursed him. "Weren't my orders to you to leave here an hour after daybreak?"

"They were, Pride of the Vardar," Gani wailed, "and my old woman waked me up long before it was light, but when Ismail Effendi led the horses to be harnessed, he lost his temper and lamed the white one with blows. We had to find another that would pull with the black horse, and the only one we could get was balky. He broke

the wagon an hour out of here, and the sun was shining on the west wheels before we started on."

Murad Pasha swore in guttural Albanian.

"And you, you spoiled egg of a scarecrow," he turned once more to Gani, "why didn't you follow your balky horses? How did you drag your carcass here?"

Gani was almost sobbing.

"When I yelled and cursed for help, one of the ruffians gave me this."

He touched his nose with a grimace and swung around the room, so that all the Turks could observe for their own benefit. The ruse was successful. It broke the serious tenseness of the situation, and the Ottomans roared at the sorry plight of the wagon-driver.

"I found myself in the ditch," Gani continued, "and stayed there until they were all gone. What can one man do against Osmanli soldiers, when he has a broken nose at that, Pride of the Vardar?"

"Where did the robbers go?" one of the Turks asked.

"The soldiers, you mean?" Gani inquired. "I don't know, Effendi; it was so dark. Somewhere up the mountain, I suppose, or else down the pass and out into the valley, or else perhaps on the road to Uskub, or perchance——"

Murad Pasha waved an impatient hand. "Take this chunk of meat out of here," he beckoned to the guards.

"Now, Dobry *Chorbadji*," the Pasha began, "you see how it was. What is to be done?"

"I should say," Dobry answered slowly, "find the thieves."

"Of course, but how?"

"They are Turkish soldiers, Mahmut says."

"They spoke Turkish and looked like soldiers," the *zaptieh* put in.

"Oh, deserters, I suppose," the Pasha muttered, "who want to fill their bean-lined stomachs with roast goose."

Dobry thought intently for a moment.

"Murad Pasha," he said at length, "this loss is not yours only, it is ours as well. The year has been dry, there is not a piaster to spare in the whole country around. Yet the Pasha must have money."

Murad nodded ready assent.

"The peasants will fear other taxes." The Pasha grunted scornfully.

"They will move heaven and earth to get the robbers," Dobry concluded.

Murad leaned forward. It was a new idea—that of coöperation with the Bulgars.

"What do you mean?" he asked eagerly.

"Let us form a posse among ourselves and scour the country. I can get men who know every inch of the mountain-land. The peasants hold Priest Azarias as an uncle. We can have him swear in every man of them and find out exactly what he knows."

"But would they?"

"Would they have meat to eat when the cold freezes their blood? They will never rest until the money is safe in Uskub."

"And who will do this?"

"Well," Dobry considered carefully, "there is Stoyan the Chandler, and Croom Dobreff and his brother——"

"Enough!" the Pasha interrupted, "lead these out, and I'll have Torgut Effendi and Midhat Effendi and—and Jemil Effendi."

Dobry rose to go.

"Oh," Murad stopped him, "you did not mention one fellow, and he is the craftiest of your whole Christian lot: Stavry, the money-changer. He can smell gold as far as Aleppo."

Dobry was taken aback. So far the plan had worked splendidly. The Turks selected were like unto Murad Pasha, mushroom-headed libertines. But hawk-eyed Stavry, the money-lender, was a different character. His crafty treachery had been a constant source of anxiety to the group which met at Dobry's studio.

"Ye-es," he admitted, "but Stavry is a busy man. Perhaps he wouldn't go—wouldn't want to, I mean——"

He had touched a wrong chord.

"Who tells Murad Pasha 'I will' or 'I will not'?" the Pride of the Vardar interrupted haughtily. "The old money-changer goes with the posse!"

Dobry bowed himself out .

CHAPTER VIII

MANIO DREAMS OF OPULENCE

TO accompany Dobry's posse, Murad Pasha had chosen three Turks as short-witted as himself, and an idiotic fortnight followed. Dobry was thorough in examining every deaf and dumb cripple in the mountain-land, and Priest Azarias performed elaborate ceremonies of "swearing in" the peasantry at every cross-road. Day by day they looked for traces of the Turkish soldiers who had robbed the tax-wagon. Barring Stavry, the Goreno men were tireless in their zeal, but the patience of the Turks was well-nigh exhausted.

They had clambered down the steep goat-path along the Pirin slopes, and their horses were waiting for them down the valley, some three hours distant by weary foot. But Dobry insisted on improving the remainder of the day by walking over to the Seven Well-springs sheep-sheds. He was sure Uncle Toshō might be able to give information about the thieving soldiery.

"Are you going to drag us to another muddle-head?" Torgut Effendi growled. "These

stupids know nothing, and I am tired of their drivel."

"It is as the Pasha commands," Dobry pled. "We have not missed a single woodshed. We must continue to proceed in our advance," and the Goreno men wisely agreed.

"But how much longer?" Stavry put in. "I've left my business a-chasing me over these hillsides. To look at you, Dobry, one would think you had organized a walking-club!"

"It isn't so bad though, is it now?" Midhat Effendi simpered, humming a gay, little air. "I didn't know what called the soldiers up to these villages so often. There are more plump quail around here than I have seen in a whole year in town. The town-game either keep too much under cover or aren't worth the bother." He started humming:

"O Aisha, Aisha, blooming blossom!"

Dobry cut him short.

"That roof a little below us is old Tosho's hut. We will stop there and perhaps at the little hamlet beyond, then go a-horse into town. That covers our route; we'll have to think up some other way for next week."

"You can think me out," Torgut Effendi snapped. "Murad Pasha has harems enough for all of me. I'm busy with my own."

They passed out of the pine-grove that hid

Tosho's hut and sheep-sheds, and into the clearing above. As they did so, two men in peasant-garb went through the back gate and took the upland trail. Stoyan the Chandler looked studiously off toward the valley. Dobry engaged the Turks in lively discussion. Only Stavry seemed to notice.

"There go two fellows up the mountain. I wonder if we shall have to chase them down before we leave."

Croom Dobreff looked at them casually.

"Two shepherds of Tosho's, I suppose," he said. "But say, Stavry, did you know that young Selim Bey is looking for a loan and offering seventeen per cent to the right person?"

Stavry crossed himself quickly.

"May holy Saint Panteleimon preserve me from generous borrowers!" he exclaimed. "Selim Bey would make me wealthy too soon!"

The two men going up the mountain had disappeared in the thick undergrowth. Croom saw them give quick glances downward and take a twisting, half-obsured side path.

Uncle Tosho sat on a bench in the sunny courtyard, smoking his pipe and directing Manio the watchman in his clumsy attempts at mending a cart-wheel. Yana knitted in the doorway, and through the open window came the buzz of a spinning-wheel and a girl's clear voice keeping time. As the Turks entered the gateway, Yana spoke in a sharp undertone. Irina's head ap-

peared an instant at the casement, then vanished and the wheel was still. Tosho rose and Manio dropped his work to listen.

"You are a long way from town, friends," Tosho said, "and look tired. Yana, bring out some fresh buttermilk."

"You might add some bread and cheese, and maybe some little cold slices, with a pretty one to serve them, if you have a pretty one handy," Midhat drawled.

Tosho glanced at him in alarm, then questioningly at his fellow countrymen. Dobry did the explaining:

"It is about the tax-money, Uncle Tosho. We are the investigating committee and have stopped here to learn if you or any of the shepherds heard or saw any signs of the Turkish soldiers that did the stealing?"

"Not the ghost of a sign," Uncle Tosho replied eagerly. "It has been just as quiet as——"

"Has it though!" Manio had been edging his way nearer the center. "Hasn't there been the ghost of a sign! I tell you, masters, this place has fairly swarmed with ghosts since All-hallowmas."

The Turks pricked up their ears.

"What kind of ghosts?" Jemil Effendi asked sharply.

"Why, there was the two-headed horse I saw down by the gate, and, saving your honor, I hope it wasn't a Turk, and the monk-maiden by the

Sweetheart's Well-spring, and the treasure——”

“Ho, but you saw all those spooks when you were drunk, Manio,” Tosho laughed. “Besides, two-headed horses and dead girls don't carry off tax-money.”

“But there are the treasure-hunters,” Manio insisted. “They carry off more bread and cheese than any two human stomachs could hold in a six-month.”

“Manio is the most superstitious old codger in the whole district,” Dobry explained, as Yana came out, bringing a pitcher of cold buttermilk, some bread, and slices of roast lamb. “Father Azarias, swear Uncle Tosho in.”

“My son Tosho,” the priest began pompously, “by the long-suffering Saint Stephen and by the benignant Saint Mitrophan——”

“Aw, shut up,” Torgut swore at him. “That clap-trap is about worn out. Here, Yana, or whatever they call you, bring on that litter. I'm hungry as a wolf.”

Manio slunk toward the edge of the group, muttering his opinions to himself.

“Young upstarts can put it over graybeards if they want, but I know what I saw. And I know the ghost of old Petko over the ridge did steal away a money-bag from his son and nobody ever found it. I think that is what these treasure-hunters are looking for. It's their digging makes them so hungry. And they're finding *something*, else where do they get the piasters to pay

Uncle Toshō for their bread and cheese?"

The words "piasters to pay Uncle Toshō" caught Stavry's greedy ears. He had been considering the general prosperous air of Toshō's establishment in surprise and speculation. Perhaps it would be well to have a little conversation with Manio. He followed the night-watchman away from the rest.

"What was that you said about treasure-hunters?" he asked insinuatingly. Manio brightened and drew himself up with an important air at being consulted by such a person as Stavry.

"They are up in the mountains somewhere," he explained. "They have been down twice now; I listened while they talked to Uncle Toshō. I heard enough. They've located a big pile somewhere: diamonds as big as duck-eggs, I imagine, and perhaps all the gold and silver coins of the Archbishop with the Flying Sandals. They want to keep the haul all to themselves, the greedy hogs, and won't let anyone else go in with them, but I imagine they pay Uncle Toshō whatever he asks when it comes to supplies. Why, just before you people came, they handed him a whole handful of piasters. They must be shoveling them in up there in the mountains!"

"How many times have they been here, did you say?"

Manio's strange tale awakened Stavry's curiosity. Evidently this was no goblin yarn.

"When did they come first?"

"Come to think of it, that was on Allhallowmas, too." Manio came closer. "That night two Turkish soldiers knocked. I saw the uniform and hid behind Yana's butter-tub, for I don't monkey around Turks. When we shepherds see those clothes, we don't feel any curiosity about what is inside. We've seen too much of their kind. I could see all that went on, though. When the soldiers asked for something to eat, Tosho gave them anything they wanted. They were so decent about it I suspected something, so peeped out and saw the face of one of the fellows in a good light. He had his head turned away from the rest.

"Well, *Chorbadji*, when I saw one of those treasure-hunters to-day I knew him in a minute. He was that very same Turkish soldier!"

Stavry gripped Manio's arm.

"Do you mean," he hissed, "that those treasure-hunters were in Turkish uniform, and it was on Allhallowmas?"

"Why, sure!" Manio wriggled away, rubbing his arm. "I think that was the night they located the treasure. All kinds of goblins were out and old Petko's ghost——"

"Manio," Stavry interrupted, "how would you like to get a little of that treasure yourself?"

"That is my idea." The old man's face flamed with eagerness. "That is exactly my idea, *Chorbadji*. But I can't do much alone. I know the

country, but those fellows will be too much for an old man like me."

"Listen," Stavry commanded. "Forget you have a tongue and go on about your business as usual. I'm rather interested in this treasure myself. What do you say to our going after it together?"

"You and me? I'll do it, *Chorbadji*." The watchman quivered with nervous excitement. "When shall we begin?"

"I'll let you know. In the meantime, keep absolutely mum. Not a word till I tell you, or you don't get a piaster's worth."

"Yes, yes, not a word, *Chorbadji*."

"Just one thing more. Manio, how far is it from here to Krividol Gulch?"

"It's a good five hours by the road," the shepherd calculated, "but only about three if you know the path over the mountains. Why?"

"No reason," and Stavry moved nonchalantly toward the others.

"Been hearing more ghost-yarns?" Dobry asked, handing him a glass of milk.

"Oh, yes," Stavry answered. "The old fellow is as chock-full of them as Granny Marya herself. Are we about ready to start?"

Dobry's distrust was quieted. "Going in a few minutes," he said.

Manio went to the barn with his head in a whirl. At last he was to be his own master. He gave the half-mended cart-wheel a contemptuous

kick as he passed, filled his pipe, and, stretching himself on a pile of straw in a sunny spot where he was pretty sure Uncle Tosho wouldn't notice him, fell to dreaming of coming days of opulence.

The posse, satisfied as to their stomachs, gathered up their coats and made ready to go down the trail toward town. They were weary of their fruitless search and anxious to be back. The three Turks looked on Dobry and his entire scheme with supreme contempt.

Out of sight of the yard, Stavry stopped with an exclamation.

"What is it?" Croom asked.

"Forgotten my long coat," he answered. "I'll have to go back. You go on; I'll catch up."

"I'll go back with you," Croom volunteered.

"There is no need of that," Stavry assured him. "I know the way."

Since he could not insist on the basis of intimacy, Croom was forced to leave him and move on. Stavry climbed rapidly until the others had passed around the bend, then walked slowly on, lost in thought.

CHAPTER IX

STAVRY'S COAT

WE'LL have to send Manio back where he came from," old Tosho was saying to Yana. "The greedy old sinner has had his money-ears opened by those two boys who come here. He saw them pay me for the bread and cheese this morning."

"I wish we knew a little more about them," Yana worried, the wrinkles in her face deepening in her anxiety. "I wish Ivan were back here."

"Ivan ought to come home and get him a wife," Tosho said. "I'm getting too old to last much longer."

"Oh, you're good for many a year yet, Uncle Tosho."

The old couple started in alarm at the unexpectedness of the remark. Stavry had come up so quietly that neither had noticed his approach.

"What is wrong?" the shepherd queried.

"I left my coat here," Stavry answered. "The others think I forgot it. I have a little matter of business to talk over with you pri-

vately, Uncle Tosho. Is there some place——”

“Of course,” but Tosho lacked enthusiasm.

“Go in the house, Yana.”

The old woman gathered up her knitting and went inside. She shut the door, but the window remained only half-closed, for Yana trusted Stavry even less than did Tosho.

“Before we come to our business, Uncle Tosho,” Stavry began, “I want to tell you a little story I heard once in Salonica.”

“A short story? Go ahead.”

“There was a prosperous merchant by the name of Ivanoff,—on good terms with everybody, and very influential among the Bulgarians. Not at all an unconnected shepherd like you, for example, Uncle Tosho.”

“Well——?”

“Well, one day an old friend of Ivanoff’s—his name was Stavry, just like mine—came to his store and invited him to the *konak*. ‘You are lucky,’ he said to him, ‘the Pasha has heard how the Bulgars respect you, and wants to have a cup of coffee with you.’ So Ivanoff cleaned up and followed his friend to the Pasha’s.

“They had hardly come into the large room of the *konak*, though, when the Pasha, without so much as lifting his head, asked in a sour voice: ‘Is this the man you spoke of, Stavry Effendi?’

“‘This is the same, Allah preserve you, Pasha,’ Ivanoff’s old friend answered; and be-

fore the poor merchant could look from right to left or say a word, two *zaptiehs* grabbed his arms and hustled him out of the room into the *konak*-cellar.

"It was all a mistake? Ivanoff wasn't a criminal of any sort? Maybe not, but he had to soak in that damp cellar for seventeen months before his case came up for trial. And when he did come up, he found that his big store had been confiscated and sold for a song to Stavry, and that if he made the least outcry about it, he'd pay another visit to the *konak*-cellar. That's what happened to the rich, influential merchant Ivanoff, who was not at all an unconnected and unimportant shepherd like you, Uncle Tosho. Can you remember this story?"

"Well, what about it?" Tosho queried.

"Now, Uncle Tosho, I'd like to ask you a few questions," Stavry continued with a friendly smile. "Wasn't it just before Allhallowmas your Ivan went to Goreno and hasn't come back since?"

"Ye-es," Tosho answered wonderingly.

"And wasn't it that same night that two Turkish soldiers stopped here for food; and aren't Turkish soldiers supposed to have robbed the Pasha's taxes that night; and haven't some treasure-seekers been coming here for food the last week or so; and doesn't your Ivan know something about these treasure-seekers?"

"I say, Tosho," Stavry leaned very close and

watched the old man keenly, "has it ever occurred to you that those Turkish soldiers looked exactly like the treasure-seekers who have been coming here?"

Uncle Tosho leaped to his feet and shook Stavry's hand in alarm. Old Yana's face appeared at the window for a fleeting instant, almost wild in its anxiety.

"And if all this is true," the old man stutted, "what then, Stavry? I—I don't say it is—I never thought of it so—but what then?"

"Don't get excited, Tosho," Stavry said quietly. "We've lived through a great many things together, you and I. We're both Bulgars, and it is nothing to me more than it is to you whether Murad Pasha has the money to build another harem or not; but I learned some things a little while ago that made some other things a good deal clearer. I know all about the meetings of Dobry and Ivan and Croom and the rest, though I haven't been invited for a long time. And I know, too, that when your Ivan goes to the city he doesn't always get there, and when he does he isn't haunting the market-place. Maybe you haven't been in that two-legged house of Dobry's, but I have, and your Ivan could tell you a good bit about the arrangements of it, too. Dobry hoodwinks Murad Pasha, but I know the tricks of him and his breed."

Tosho listened in silence. Confused impressions over which he had pondered, remarks he

had heard from his son began to take on clear form. His heart beat rapidly; life-long dreams of his father and father's father thrilled him anew.

"Gani was the driver of that wagon," Stavry kept on, "and Gani never fails to be present at Dobry's meetings. There is a deal of talk, but you and I will come down to facts, Tosho. We may or may not be in sympathy with these plans for revolution; we may know it needs money; but we ourselves have to live, and two hundred thousand piasters don't come into our reach every day, hey?"

Were Stavry's half hints so unintelligible to Tosho's simple way of thinking, or was the old shepherd only pretending not to understand?

"I don't just get what you are driving at, Stavry," he said in a puzzled voice, taking off his sheepskin cap and scratching his gray, stubby hair. "Tell me plainly what you mean and what you want."

Stavry studied the stones on the court-pavement for a moment, then rested his right hand on the top of his cane and kept time to his slow words with an emphatic forefinger.

"On Allhallowmas night, Dobry Vladimiroff, Stoyan the Chandler, Croom Dobreff, and some dozen others, with your Ivan among them, disguised as Turkish soldiers, stopped and robbed Murad Pasha's tax-wagon and killed all the guards but one, Mahmut. Some of them are

hiding with the treasure in the mountains and waiting for the storm to blow over; the rest are in Gorenno playing the innocent, while the leaders have cheated Murad into sending them from village to village as this posse."

Tosho staggered back.

"My son Ivan—all that money! Holy Saint Petka and Saint Nedelia—Stavry, do you know what you are saying?"

Yana had forgotten her caution and was leaning over the window-sill, crossing herself and mumbling her prayers. Her teeth chattered, her lips were bloodless and trembling.

"Don't play the innocent with me now, Tosho," Stavry spoke sternly. "I know you are in with this crowd, else why should these treasure-seekers be coming here? Now, since I have found you out and could lose the whole business for you, suppose you just let me in on it too. One more to divide with won't make such a lot of difference."

The red spots on the old man's face grew purple. At last he understood his man. His eyes blazed.

"So that is the coat you forgot?" he said in a low, tense voice. "That's the sort of Bulgar you are! Let me tell you this: I don't know one single thing of which you speak. I give those treasure-hunters food because they pay for it. Farther than this I do not know."

"Come, come, Tosho, can't you really see? Either you give me my share of the money, or I tell the whole affair to Murad Pasha."

The old man's body quivered with uncontrollable rage. He shook his fist in the townsman's face.

"You damnable, greedy hound," he hissed. "It isn't enough to sell a wood-cutter's axe out of his hands to pay a debt he has paid you twice over in interest; it isn't enough to tear a widow's shirt off her back, and drive a white-haired man, with one foot already in the grave, out of his home and sell it for half-price to his enemy, just to settle your crooked accounts. No, you'd betray your own flesh and blood to satisfy your avarice. But you'll pay for it! You'll pay for it!"

He advanced nearer and nearer Stavry. The other backed away from the threatening fist, slipping, sliding over the courtyard stones. Still old Tosho advanced, lavishing all his pent-up vocabulary on his departing visitor:

"You misbegotten whelp of a wild hog, you jaw-of-an-ass and viper's tongue, you seventeen kinds of a sneaky lizard crawling over a village dungheap, you stinking cockroach of a money-lender, you Turkish bootlicking hypocrite, you smiling swill-bucket of rottenness, you——"

Stavry had reached the gate and backed himself out. There for the first time he turned from the irate old shepherd and hurried down

the road. At a safe distance he turned once more and called back:

"You can shake your fist now, Tosho. Mine is of a different brand. It may lead, not drive you out the gate."

He waved his cane vindictively and limped down the road. Yana ran out and clasped Tosho's arm in silent despair.

"It's all right, old woman, it's all right," he reassured her, but his voice shook uncertainly.

The posse had reached the village long before Stavry entered. Dobry was just finishing a late supper when the money-lender's cane knocked at the heavy gate.

"I'd like to talk to you for a minute in the studio, Dobry," he said.

CHAPTER X

"TURK'S HEAD" AND A SLEEVE OF WATER

HAD the keenest human eye perred its hardest from the edge of the "Turk's Head" cliff that moonless Saturday near-morning in mid-November, it could have seen nothing but elusive mist and filmy desolation all about. But a sharp ear, used to the one hundred and seventeen sounds of a wild forest, could have distinguished a strange undertone in the early morning song of the Pirin mountain-land. A Balkan woodsman would have confused the rhythmic beat with the dull thumpy thud of a woodpecker; a Turkish fisherman might have mistaken the single splash-and-feather sound for the work of some ambitious lunatic, braving the Struma narrows alone for the sake of a mountain trout. But no eye, Christian or Moslem, watched the river's course from the "Turk's Head" cliff and no ear listened on that foggy morning in November. Only the Struma felt the sweeping paddle of Ivan the Huntsman's boat.

The Struma River, a day's journey to the west

from Gorenno and the Ladna valley, runs in a general southward direction, until it encounters at the end of the Krividol Gulch a barrier of arrogant rock, which checks its headlong flight and turns it back northward for a week's wandering about the gullies of the mountains, until finally it eels its way through the "Turk's Head" narrows and speeds toward the plains and the White Ægean Sea.

Only the skill of a boatman-born, combined with an intimate knowledge of that wild region, could have lent the courage to undertake what Ivan the Huntsman was undertaking. The fogs hung low and heavy over the zig-zaggy course of the Struma River, veiling the outline of the steep banks on either side in ominous mist. The night mated dark rock and darker water in one indistinct expanse—an elemental marriage that forbade all intrusion. Overhead the sheer cliffs, stretching across the water, seemed almost to touch each other, and filmy cloud-knots of heavy fog turned out to be rocks that grazed the light boat menacingly.

Once a rasping whirr that almost upset the craft left Ivan surveying soberly a leaky bow. He jammed it tight with a bit of packing and a tattered rag of shirt-sleeve, and paddled on. As he rounded the shoals beyond "Turk's Head," a crash overhead made him start with apprehension, and he barely swung around to safety when a boulder rolled over the scalp of the cliff and

splashed with an angry gurgle into the black depths a few feet to the left.

But in all the elusive, ominous sweep of hostile nature, there was no sign of human presence, and Ivan paddled ahead, cautious but unafraid. The twists and turns of the Struma River were as familiar to him as his coat-sleeves.

The hardy boat was in fact an argosy. One-half of the Krividol affair booty was in gold—one thousand Turkish pounds; the rest was in silver *medjidiehs* and some copper coins. To transport the small moneys into Bulgaria was out of the question: they would have made a load too heavy and too conspicuous to avoid detection, and, even if they crossed the border in safety, it would have been impracticable to use the small Turkish coin in Bulgaria. But gold knows no political allegiance and commands market prices anywhere.

For this reason three of Ivan's intimate shepherd friends carried the treasure to one of their mountain rendezvous, and a fortnight after the capture they divided the money into several loads. The silver and copper coins they apportioned among the several heroes of the incident, whose duty was to exchange them for gold as promptly and as unobtrusively as possible. But the thousand golden liras were entrusted to Ivan the Huntsman, to be removed to a point far away and concealed in safety until the remainder of the booty had been changed into gold and the

whole amount could be transported to Bulgaria, to buy arms and ammunition for the Goreno revolutionary district.

To carry it overland to the part of the forest Ivan had selected was to run the risk of meeting some wandering band, and the only boat available was too small to hold the combined weight of the gold and two men. Yet who could brave the Struma River rapids alone unless he could see his way ahead?

Ivan the Huntsman thought of a wild summer spent on the highland waters of Syno Lake; a broken oar had compelled him to learn paddling in order to make his way out of the wilds.

The extra oar on the small boat was speedily cut down to the shape of a paddle; and with the precious treasure-bags aboard, Ivan pulled lustily at the oars and vanished around the Krividol bend of the Struma. As the river began to speed down towards the dangerous narrows, he put the oars aside, turned so as to face ahead, and started paddling.

Dawn was near when he left the main course of the river and turned into a narrow sleeve of water that seemed to lose itself in the forest of dark taciturn pine and whispering birch. He landed at a nature-made pier in the cleft between two rocks, tied the boat to a pine tree whose roots sprawled over the stones in search of soil, and plunged into the dense woods, toting the heavy bag of gold, a large piece of burlap,

a crow-bar, and a stout, sharp-pointed spade. Two minutes' walk brought him to a small clearing in the woods, monopolized by a magnificent old pine, forked at the base of the trunk. He stopped, laid down his treasure-load, and surveyed the forest land in the immediate vicinity.

The trees were mostly pine and young birch, with here and there an oak. But Ivan's trained woodsman eye required only a brief search to discover the sort of thing he sought. Some forty paces beyond the forked pine-giant, in the same general direction he had followed in coming up from the Struma bank, he found a beech tree, the only one of its kind within twice as large a radius around the pine. A couple of feet from it, at the foot of a birch too dwarfed and distorted ever to fear the woodcutter's axe, Ivan saw a heavy boulder. Apparently it was just what he had been seeking, for he returned for his load and got down to work immediately.

The rock clung obstinately to its place, but after some effort, Ivan succeeded in wedging his crowbar underneath and pushing the boulder against the birch trunk. Then, spreading out his burlap, he began to dig a hole in the center of the hollow under the stone, piling the dirt onto the burlap. When the cloth was half-covered with the rich brown earth, Ivan tied the money sack around and around with some heavy twine he carried, lined the hole with small pebbles to protect the leather bag, and deposited his

rich cargo on top. He packed as much of the dirt as he could tight around it and then carefully pushed the boulder back into its place. Barring the small remaining pile of dirt on his burlap, not a single mark of his work was left.

Without marking birch or beech tree in any way, he walked back to the directly opposite side of the giant pine in the center of the small clearing, and stopped at one tree after another until he finally found a very young oak from which he could look through the cloven pine-trunk and get a clear view of the solitary beech and dwarfed birch on the other side of the clearing. Ivan blazed the young oak prominently with a cross-mark, and walked from it to the forked pine,—thirty-two paces; then from the pine to the beech tree, forty-one paces. Writing down both figures in a note-book, he gathered up the pile of dirt on the burlap cloth and carried it a long distance off into some thick brushwood. He came back, picked up crowbar and spade, looked about to see that he had left no traces of his work, and walked back to the water; then, untying the boat, he paddled out of the river-sleeve and into the main bed of the Struma.

Another half-hour of paddling, and his eye caught the outline of another similar sleeve, this time to the left. Here the Struma was nearing the open country, and the bank was less rocky. Ivan paddled off toward the middle of the river, bound the two oars tight to the heavy crowbar,

and dropped them into the black water. He entered the sleeve, landed, pulled the improvised canoe deep into the woods out of sight, took from the boat a bag almost full of year-old pine gum and an iron bark-scraper, and plunged into the thick of the forest.

"Third sleeve to the right after the 'Turk's Head,' " he murmured to himself.

To a chance passerby he would have appeared as an early-bird-of-a-peasant out a-gumming.

CHAPTER XI

THE SENSE OF BEING WAITED FOR

AS Boyan the Hermit climbed the tortuous path to his cave, only his hood and cassock proclaimed the anchorite. He sprang lightly over the rocks, stopping now and then to draw full, deep breaths of the clear mountain air or whistle an answer to some bird-call from the woods. But for the hood and cassock, not the wildest imagination would have pictured him barefoot and shivering before a lithographed Virgin.

Boyan was still the recluse fanatic, but the past two weeks had broken in upon his most pious habits. At first the girl needed constant attention, then, as the wound healed, he became timid about asking woman's help, and now he no longer desired it. His heart felt a peculiar sense of aloneness—a sense of being waited for. So, without caring to know just why, Boyan bounded up the path like a peasant lad on a holiday, scarcely feeling the heavy sack on his shoulders or the jug he carried in his hand.

He laughed to himself as he thought of old Toshō's amazement at the quantity of food he

had requested, and his care that it be fresh and good.

"Perhaps you'd better give him some of your fruit-cakes, Yana," the old man had remarked jokingly. "You'll still have time to mix another batch before Christmas. And maybe a jug of plum-brew, since the Holy Brother has taken to living so fatly."

"It is not that I would fill my body with the lusts of the flesh, good uncle," Boyan replied, "but when your bold Ivan last visited my nook, he reproached my hospitality severely."

"You are expecting my Ivan!" Yana exclaimed. "Tosho is a fool. When did a few dried carrots and water satisfy my big lad? I'll see that your load is heavy enough, Holy Brother; and, Holy Brother, do beg him not to forget his old mother," and she hurried away.

It had not been an intentional lie and Boyan's conscience was easy—the more so perhaps as he realized that the milk, foaming in his jug, would bring bounding life back to his strange guest.

The squirrels chattered at him in friendly wise from the bare branches of the trees. Chipmunks peeped from the dry leaves or whisked about fallen logs, knowing no fear of the black-clad figure. Now and then he scattered a few crumbs over the path as offerings for the chickadees and sparrows that twittered among the pines, willing to brave the winter's cold.

As the mouth of the cave came in view, a

friendly glow lighted up the entrance walls. Boyan gave a clear, piercing whistle, repeated three times. A figure in cassock appeared at the opening. She came down the path limping slightly, and when she reached the clearing in the pines, the glowing noonday sun glinted on thick braids of blue-black hair.

"How long you have been absent, Boyan! I am almost starved, with nothing to eat but water-cresses."

"The Lord gives but doesn't carry home for you," the hermit answered merrily, "and it is a stiff climb from Uncle Tosho's."

They walked together to the cave.

"They are in pretty much of a mix-up down there," Boyan went on. "I don't just understand it myself; a big robbery; treasure-hunting and all that. The night-watchman, Manio, followed me up the trail for half an hour, jabbering all manner of idiotic nonsense. He asked me if I knew of some men up in the mountains who, he thinks, are guarding a treasure. He has enlisted *Chorbadji* Stavry to help him cheat them out of their money. The only thing he seems afraid of is the ghost of one Grandpa Petko, who appears to have some hold on the money-bags. He wanted me to offer prayers——"

"Who is Stavry?" the girl interrupted suddenly, stopping in front of him. "The money-lender of Goreno?"

"I think so. Why?"

"How did Manio get acquainted with him?"

"Stavry came up with a posse in connection with the robbery. They were searching Uncle Tosho's place. Manio spoke of this treasure and roused Stavry's suspicions. Tosho says Stavry could smell a silver *medjidieh* in a clay-bank. I'm afraid the old uncle is having some trouble. Why, what is the matter?"

The girl was one intense, pale eagerness.

"Do you know what the robbery was; when it happened?"

"I'm not sure." He was surprised at her interest. "But I think it concerns the taxes and happened some time ago—on Allhallow eve. Why! that is——" he stopped. Something kept him from finishing his sentence, "the same night you came here!"

There had been so much of mystery about her. Sometimes she was merry and carefree, at other times morose or lost in thought from which he could not rouse her. But never one word, one clue, had she given him concerning her former associations. Boyan did not even know his guest's name. And now, this strange coincidence!

He thought of the belt of bullets he had found strapped over her shoulder. He had thrown them away, but the memory of them remained, disconcerting. Tosho had said that runaway soldiers were the thieves. Still the strange association lingered; she had been so intensely interested.

The girl handed him a pail.

"Go for water," she commanded almost harshly. "I shall get dinner ready."

She limped here and there, storing the provisions in safe nooks. He had quite forgotten the surprise he had planned for her with the milk. She evidently accepted it as a matter of course and put the jug outside in a cool corner between mossy stones. When he remembered, it did not seem to matter any more.

Neither spoke during the preparations. He gave little help, but watched her as she hurried here and there.

"It is ready," she said shortly, and they sat down before the stone table. But no merry conversation ensued; even their hunger seemed to have vanished; everything seemed cheerless; once or twice she shivered when a cold draft came in the opening.

When they had finished, he piled the wood high on the fire and spread a blanket for her to lie upon. She was very restless and nervous. There were a few moments of silence as they sat before the fire. Then she propped her head on her hand and said:

"You have never asked what brought me here."

He did not answer, but watched the flames curling over the pine bark.

"So I am going to tell you," she finished.

CHAPTER XII

THE MAKING OF A JOAN OF ARC

“**M**Y MOTHER was a very young woman and I remember thinking she was the most beautiful woman in the world. Father was much older. He had come to our Pirin village from somewhere in Southern Macedonia, where he had fought in a revolt against the Turks and had to run away. He married my mother before he had been in Tetino more than a year. They loved each other devotedly, and our home was a nest of joy.

“There were no Turks in Tetino then; not until I was about six did they begin coming up to the village. Then a garrison was established to control the mountain passes of the Struma near by. After that we were never without fear.

“My father knew them and scarcely ever left mother and me alone. He added another layer of stones to the house-wall; I was forbidden to go outside the courtyard. It was very lonely and tedious after having been used to playing in the fields and on the mountain-side. The word ‘Turk’ couched more terror for me than all the ghosts and goblins of childland.

"When I was seven, my brother was born. They were all so proud of the little fellow that I began to feel neglected and lonelier than ever. One afternoon, while my mother was still weak, the court became unendurable; I slipped through the gate and ran out to my old playground. It was deserted, but the childish intoxication of unrestraint was upon me. I ran on and on, farther and farther from home, touching the leaves, the flowers, rubbing my face against the trees in utter delight.

"It was getting late, however, and I knew my father would soon be back from the fields. I began retracing my steps down the hillside. There was a fork in the road about half-way home; just before I reached it, I heard loud singing and laughter. I can feel yet how my heart beat; a group of Turkish soldiers were coming down the road. I would have hidden in the bushes, but it was too late. Already one of them had caught sight of me.

"'Hello, here's a bouncing one out for an afternoon jaunt. Whither art skipping, little squirrel?'

"The words and laugh paralyzed me. My knees grew stiff; my feet felt rooted. I stood and stared in terror. The Turk drew nearer."

The hermit stirred uneasily. He muttered something; the girl wondered if it was a prayer.

"'Have you lost your tongue, little one?' the Turk continued. 'Haven't seen a handsome

gentleman like me before, have you?' and he started to pinch my cheek.

"The touch of his hand broke the spell. I dodged and ran at full speed down the road.

"'Ho, ho,' he shouted, 'watch the little chipmunk run!'

"Whether he followed I do not know, but I heard one of the others call out:

"'Don't rob the cradle, Salih Effendi. Save her for another year.'

"Breathless, gasping, I rushed into our kitchen, where mother was chatting with old Donna, who helped with the work. I threw myself in her arms and sobbed out the whole story. Mother clasped me in despair; old Donna came and bent over us both.

"There was no light except from the fireplace and it flickered hideously over Donna's withered, distorted face. She touched a deep scar that disfigured her mouth and one side of her face.

"'I have told you before, Petra, this is the only way out of it,' she said to my mother. 'She is far too beautiful to escape the jackals.'

"Mother pushed her away and clasped me more closely, crying my name over and over, caressing me as she had not done for months. I could not understand, but I clung to her and grew quieter. I was asleep when my father entered.

"For weeks after that, mother often called me to her and fondled me and studied my face for

hours. Sometimes she would stand me before the mirror, crying:

“ ‘Look at yourself, Adalena! Look at yourself and never forget how beautiful you were!’ ”

“And I stared at my face in the glass and could not understand what it was all about.

“During these days the American missionaries were making a round of our villages. They often stopped at our house to leave tracts, take dinner, or buy oats for their horses, and, though father was friendly to them, he never gave them any encouragement to hold a prayer-meeting in Tetino.

“I think father would have made a poor proselyte, Boyan, as would most of our Macedonians. It was the intangible self-respect of the missionaries that fascinated him. Their eyes lacked the hunted look; their shoulders, their bearing, all breathed an atmosphere of fields unfenced, unravaged, broad, free. The American women, too, looked one straight in the face and didn't keep turning around to see who followed.

“This strange air of freedom lingered in our home even after they rode away, until the sound of some soldier Turk dispelled the illusion. Yet every time they came they left my father gloomier. He would look at their vanishing horses and would shake his fist at something that seemed to defy him. Was the American God a different one from Him who had so forgotten our Macedonian land in His accounts?

"I don't know what father thought about God, but the candle before our Virgin stopped burning, and even the Easter mass could not draw him to church. Mother watched his deepening gloom and she hated the missionaries for disturbing our predestined lot of misery with visions of freedom and joy.

"One day mother clung to me more than usual. I heard father tell her to keep closely inside; a new detachment of Bashibozouks had just entered the village. When he went toward the street, she called him back and had him kiss me twice. Then she led me into the kitchen. Donna was there, her old face more distorted than ever. She stood near the table, which was drawn up before the window, and I saw a long, sharp knife in her hands.

"'Come here, little lovely one,' she cried, 'we'll fix you safe from the Bozouks. They won't care to touch our girl when old Donna is through.'

"Mother lifted me on the table and for a while almost smothered me with kisses, while the tears soaked the neck of my dress. Then she pushed me back, looked at me steadily an endless time, so it seemed to me, and flung herself face downward on the floor in front of the fireplace.

"I looked wonderingly from her to Donna. The old woman pulled me to her. I felt no fear; Donna had been like a second mother to me and I loved her in spite of her hideousness. She felt

of my face-muscles carefully, muttering all the while in a dull monotone:

" 'Donna will do for her girl—just what Donna's mother did for her. The Turkish dogs pick out the pretty girls first.'

"She lifted the knife and drew the back of the blade across my face. The cold of the steel frightened me; I jerked back quickly and cried out. She snatched up the knife. Her eyes gleamed red; she grabbed for me. I screamed in terror, but her grip was relentless. The knife descended. I shut my eyes and screamed.

"Some one grabbed me from behind, but not before the hard steel had cut into my cheek. The wife of the missionary had entered the open door just in time. Donna's slash had missed its aim and a mere cut was the result; but I thought I was being killed, and kicked and screamed in the missionary's arms.

"When I remember next, the American lady was quieting me with cold water and wiping the blood away. My mother lay motionless before the fireplace. Donna was gone. I never saw her again.

"It was hours before order was restored. Mother was weak and helpless. The good woman who had saved me volunteered to stay with us for several days, and while she was there mother explained to her the whole story.

"It is an old device, you know, and not uncommon even in these days, to save the beautiful

daughters from Turkish lust by slashing their faces into hideous ugliness. Boyan, Boyan, only in our songs do we in Macedonia dream of beauty; in actual life beauty is a curse to a woman. The American lady was beautiful; her mother had cherished and nourished beauty as a woman's treasure. Our mothers extinguish its first awakening, for only the repulsive face is safe. Honor is enough for a Macedonian.

"The missionary told us of the American school for girls. She offered to take me back with her and care for me there. She would see that I was well educated; perhaps I might become a great teacher. My mother and father debated long, but at last I went away."

Adalena changed her position until she could put her chin on both hands, and looked dreamily in the fire.

"The next five years I was gaily, carelessly happy. The missionaries had one child, a girl near my own age, who had just returned from a visit to America, and to her every hero and heroine in all history was an American. I remember once she told me of a wondrous woman who had led whole armies in a revolution against England—how she had finally elected George Washington for President, and so angered the British that they burned her—'burned her just like a chunk of wood,' Annie would end, shivering with horror.

" 'But how could they,' I asked one day, 'when

she was an American? Did they dare burn an American, those British Turks?’

“‘Well, you see,’ Annie answered confidently, ‘she wasn’t a naturalized citizen, but only born there. You can’t understand these things, but you would if you were an American.’

“And that was my first introduction to Joan of Arc. It made a great impression on me; I used to dream of her at night leading armies to victory and freeing the whole people. I would waken in the morning trembling with excitement, and spend the day absorbed in my dream, thinking, wishing, hoping I, too, could be some such woman.

“I was in the schoolyard one day in the summer of my twelfth year when Annie came rushing to me.

“‘Adalena, Adalena,’ she cried, ‘mother wants you. My father is going over the mountains to Tetino and will take you to see your parents.’

CHAPTER XIII

WEIGHED IN THE BALANCES

“**I**T WAS a hot, sultry evening when we approached Tetino. I could scarcely restrain my eagerness. How glad my parents would be! What a rollicking boy I expected to find in my brother!

“The missionary whipped up and we drove at top speed to my father’s house near the outskirts of the village. Its ruins were still smoking.

“I jumped from the carriage, crying out my father’s name. The missionary tried to restrain me; he saw a man sitting on a stone in the desolate courtyard, mumbling to himself:

“‘They have taken them all—my precious ones. The Turks have taken them all.’

“‘It is Grandfather Tasko,’ I cried, ‘my mother’s father!’

“I clasped his knees, begging him to tell me where my parents and my brother were. He did not recognize me, seeming only bothered, and mumbled on:

“‘The little boy, they beat his brains out against a tree. My Petra, my beautiful one, they

carried away. The strong husband was not there, and old Tasko is very weak; he could not strike. They are gone. The Turks have taken them all.'

"'But, grandfather,' I begged, 'where did they take my mother, Petra?'"

"'Yes, Petra, Petra! Next day at the foot of the cliff lies Petra, cold. I buried my girl. Old Tasko can't save. He digs graves. Dig one for himself.'

"He shook his head and took up his wild recitative. We put him in the buggy and drove as fast as we could to a shepherd's cabin up the mountain-trail. There we learned the details of the massacre.

"My father had been suspected and fled to the mountains, planning to return that night for mother and the boy; but the Turks let loose their passions in the afternoon, and a general massacre followed. The shepherd had heard that my father had gone to Sofia.

"Grandfather Tasko died that night, and the next day we went back to the mission. I stayed until I was seventeen.

"There was to be a great missionary conference at Sofia that year, and a company were going from the school. I begged to join them, but it was no religious zeal that urged me. I had two ambitions: to find my father and to avenge the death of my mother and brother.

"The meetings were devout enough, but continual prayer and thanksgiving oppressed me. I

felt no fear in Bulgaria's capital; I had not seen a Turk since I came.

"It was an afternoon session of special prayer for Macedonia, and I could not bear the petitions any more. 'It is not enough to say Our Father, one must also say Amen,' you know. I said my Amen, and slipped into the street.

"A wandering spirit came over me. The streets bristled with jostling crowds. I had never seen such multitudes before. Was my father somewhere in this aimless throng? Hoping against hope, I stared at the faces hurrying past. The phantom chase led me on from street to street, until the large plate windows of a café caught my eyes. Men and women sat at small tables, chatting and laughing, perfectly carefree and unafraid, just as the Americans did in Macedonia.

"At a table for four, drawn in a corner apart from the others, a heavily bearded man discoursed earnestly with two young fellows. His flashing eyes as he addressed now one, now the other, caught my attention, held it. I pressed my face against the glass.

"Ten years had not made me forget that face. I rushed in wildly and threw my arms in mad joy about my father's neck."

The girl leaned against the wall and clasped one knee with her hands.

"The rest is recent history," she said. "Father was planning a great Macedonian uprising. He

would go from village to village preaching revolt until all Macedonia was ready for freedom; then strike one concerted blow. I did not go back to the missionary school.

"We went together on our mission. For two years we traveled up and down the Bulgarian regions of Macedonia: from Uskub to Monastir and Ochrid, from Salonica to Kirk-Kilisseh. Everywhere Bulgars suffered, everywhere they dreamed of liberty, but there was no united effort, no organization. A leader was their great need, and my father became that leader.

"You would think it glorious work? Yes, but it was hard, wearying work, too, Boyan. Up in their mountain nests the brigand *voivodas* roamed free, defying Turkish tyranny, like untamed eagles of the Macedonian wilds. But we had to move under the very nose of the Turk; in plain and valley we crawled from village to village organizing the peasantry against the great day. My fathers' heart burned within him when he witnessed Moslem outrages, but he checked reprisals; his one passion was to prepare the masses for the one final revolution that was the dream of his life. To that he sacrificed all. His own life he counted for nothing. He was only a torch, he said, carrying the flame abroad; some day he would burn out.

"One night the district leaders of the revolutionary organization held a conference in one of the Monastir villages. I could not go, but waited

long in a mountain-hut for father's return. He never came, nor did any of the others. The Turks had discovered the assembly.

"Since then I have taken up my father's work. It must succeed, Boyan. The struggle is inevitable; it must find us ready. The peasantry would lay down their lives to a man, but they do not know *how*. They need a leader. I do all I can, but after all I am a woman, though but few in Macedonia know it."

She stopped and looked at him intently. Appealing admiration glowed in her eyes as she gazed at the massively built frame of him; the muscular, masterful shoulders, which no cassock could utterly conceal, the tense features, the eyes that looked far away. She had felt their compelling fire. What unspoken, unrequited agonies burned beneath this hermit's hood; were they the immemorial agonies of Macedonia? He was lost in thought; she gazed, waited, hoped. At last he spoke:

"What can all your peasantry do against the uncounted soldiers of the Sultan? They come and come and there is no end to their coming. You and your comrades are like children trying to dam the sea with pebbles. The first tide sweeps your labors away."

"Let it sweep! Others will come, and others—and oh, Boyan! if we can not dam that tide, then let it sweep us away! We can not rest idly and watch—we can not, and you can not!"

He smiled bitterly. "It sweeps you away in new tides of blood—and every to-morrow is worse than the yesterday!"

"But the great to-morrow is coming, Boyan. Before the clash of destiny can begin, the pawns must be cleared off the field. Pawns we are of liberty; we may never see the great day, but we alone can speed its coming."

"It will never come for Macedonia," Boyan muttered. "You have nothing on your side, only sheep a-plenty to slaughter,—only numbers."

"Only numbers!" Adalena cried warmly. "Numbers, Boyan, and consecration. I read once of a cloud of locusts in Tripoli. The Arabs had tried to check their ravaging advance by destroying the only bridge over a sluggish stream which ran across their path. The crawling millions stopped only for a minute when they reached the bank, then the thousand first-comers crawled in. The water washed them off against the bulrushes. Tens of thousands followed; hundreds of thousands piled their dead bodies over, under, alongside the rest; the sluggish current could not keep up with the living flood of legs and wings and fat bellies,—and over the bridge of the silent thousands, the buzzing millions crossed to the other side.

"My father died,—and I shall die after him, and most of us who prepare the way, and many of those who lead the people at the great day of reckoning will perish, but across their dead

bodies Macedonia will march into the great freedom of which we are all dreaming."

"Dreaming,—always dreaming!" he sighed. "Of what avail are dreams of liberty? The peasants have no money, and bare fingers are not rifles."

Adalena lowered her voice to a whisper.

"True," she answered. "Still—money comes in now and then. Two hundred thousand piasters will buy many rifles."

He sprang to his feet. Two hundred thousand piasters!

"So it was you! You, a woman, and peasant lads who robbed Murad Pasha's tax-wagon and murdered his soldiers!"

Her eyes flamed dangerously.

"Robbed!" she cried. "What have we done but tried to give back to the people what is their own? Call Murad Pasha a robber, murderer, if you will, but not us who would kill a dozen leeches to save a thousand children of misery. This money is for arms, Boyan, saved against the day of wrath, when a thousand men in a mountain pass may turn the balance against the Turk."

"But—but this is all dreaming. It has been dreamed a hundred times." He waved an impatient hand. "After all, there is no organization."

"There is organization," she protested, "crude but growing."

She sprang to his side and caught his arm.

"Boyan," she pleaded, "we need a leader. I have watched you. Will you come?"

"I?" he cried in surprise. "What do you ask? I am only a hermit; I have given my life to God and to peace."

"God! Let God live with the gods. Man must live with men. What does your life here amount to? What right have you to eat even Tosho's dried onions? What avails it if you kneel all day before that,"—she pointed to the candle-lighted Virgin—"when men are slaughtered and living virgins ruined all about you, and you do not raise your finger?"

He shook her off. "You slander what is holy," he said bitterly. "Yours is not the only story; I, too, have suffered, lost all in Turkish massacres, but I saw it was no use. I came here to seek peace and freedom. I had it—till you came."

"And you mean to stay here? Do nothing but pray and chatter your teeth through gospels and liturgies and saintly disciplines?"

"It brings me peace. In the name of freedom, you incite both Bulgar and Turk, and only fresh masacres follow."

"So this is your answer? This is all you will do?"

"You and your peasants have tried only one way! I have tried both; tried and failed."

She threw back her head; her eyes flashed fire and her lips trembled.

"It is only a cassock and hood," she said. "I thought I had found a man."

The curtains swept about her. She threw herself on the couch of pine needles and the blankets swayed together. Boyan stared at them speechless. Never had he seen a woman so magnificent, never had he been cut so deeply. He clenched his fist and stood rigid, his lips working.

The November night wind whistled weirdly about the cave; ghostly cadences rustled through the trees. The dying coals flickered one by one and went out. After a long time Boyan relaxed; he raked together the few remaining embers and made ready for the night. His muscles ached and he moved slowly.

"Yet I was right, I am right," he kept murmuring to himself as he rolled himself in his blanket. "It is useless, firebrand work. A fool can throw a stone into the sea, but a hundred wise men can not pull it out."

But he could not bring himself to approach the Virgin and Child.

Broad daylight wakened him, and he stretched himself uncomfortably. He felt confused. It seemed as if something disastrous had happened. Gradually he awakened enough to remember detail after detail of the past night. She had left him in anger; perhaps the day would bring a more rational mood.

Evidently Adalena was still asleep. He sprang up and hurried to prepare breakfast; he would

surprise her when she came out. It was soon ready, and he called softly. He craved to speak aloud the name he had learned only the night before, but his lips would not frame the syllables.

There was no response to his summons. He waited until the breakfast grew cold. Still she did not appear. The silence in the cave was death-like. It chilled Boyan. It had never been so still before, not even when he was alone. He held his breath to listen: not the faintest whisper of a sound could he hear.

Timidly at first, then emboldened by anxiety, he approached the curtaining blankets. He listened again, and pushed them back. The place was empty; her hood and cassock gone. He caught hold of the curtains and buried his face in his arm. The truth he had been suppressing for days shouted itself in his ears.

"Adalena," he whispered, "I love you, love you."

His weight was too much for the partition. The blankets fell about his feet, leaving the cave barer and more comfortless than ever.

CHAPTER XIV

DULGOKOSSA

THE fitful flame played about the fresh sticks of wood as Dobry tossed them on to the glowing coals of the studio fireplace. The hours wore away—midnight and past—when suddenly he straightened up, alert. The frost on the paving-stones outside creaked lightly. He stole over to the small window to listen and had just put his ear to the pane, when a handful of dirt rattled against it and a stick knocked on the wall: once, twice, thrice, very rapid and short strokes, then a long, hard beat as if the stick rubbed against the stones. He started. It was the knock of the Gorenó comrades.

He could see nothing and waited in silence. The rapping came again, this time more insistent and somewhat different; a long, two short, and another long stroke. Dobry went down, turned the key, and opened the street door. In the light of a dying moon a monk-clad figure stood silhouetted.

“Dobry?” the voice was low.

“Well, by my icon-brushes, is it you, your Holi-

ness? In with you, brother, and toast your shins a bit. The fire is as good as if you were expected."

The guest stole past him, climbed to the balcony, and entered the studio. He appropriated Dobry's armchair and stretched his feet toward the friendly warmth. Dobry noticed that the monk seemed lame.

"I heard rumors and couldn't stay away any longer," his Holiness began. "Would have come sooner, but the bullet I tried to stop with my knee that night has kept me laid up."

"You were hurt? We feared as much; we accounted for every one except you. Where did you vanish? You look pretty well fed."

"Not very far coming, but a long way going back," the monk answered. "Now what of the Cause, Dobry? I have come to hear everything. To-morrow I start for Uskub. I had hoped to take a comrade with me, but it is not to be this time."

"Wish I could go," Dobry said regretfully, throwing his arm about the monk's shoulder. "But we here in Goreno need all the wits we have for the next few days. Ivan the Huntsman has crossed over to Bulgaria to arrange for the transport of the money. The gold he has hidden somewhere; the silver and small coin is to be changed into gold without attracting suspicion, and then the whole amount is to go across the border. It will bring rifles and ammunition to

the comrades in Goreno and also to the villages where Ivan's lads come from. The rest goes to the Cause at large."

"Good," the monk muttered.

"But Stavry the money-lender has caught on."

The monk nodded. "How much does he suspect?"

"By putting two and two together, he has just about the whole plot. He tried to threaten old Tosho first, and promised to keep still if he got a share of the money; but Tosho, knowing nothing of course, backed the old vulture out with his fist. Then he came straight to me and put the same proposition, and I wasn't quick enough to throw him off the track. I told him to give me a few days to think it over."

"And if you do give him the amount he wants?" The monk's face was set.

"It may quiet him for a while, but we'll never be sure. The simple truth is, the devil has the grip on us."

"How do you propose to tie his tongue?"

Dobry shook his head. There was a long silence. The monk's heart beat until it seemed to shake the robe. At last:

"There is one sort of man who never tells tales."

Dobry looked up in quick surprise, then shuddered at what he read in the stern young face.

"You mean——? Surely you can not——"

To kill a Bulgar?"

"I would have killed my own father had he proved traitor to the Cause. It is the Cause alone that counts. Dobry, the life of Stavry the money-lender is only one against thousands, which his treachery imperils."

The monk pushed back the armchair and leaned over the painter, pressing his shoulders firmly with both hands.

"It is time for you to know. Look at me! Look closely. Am I——?" There was a quick, violent shake of the head. The cap fell back to the shoulders, and over it two long braids of black hair.

"*Dulgokossa!*" Dobry cried, springing to his feet and catching her hand.

"You know me, then?"

"Know you? I have dreamed of you night and day. My father told me of you; that some day you would come to us."

"I know. You have the name from him. He always called me The Long-Haired One. Your father and mine worked together until the end. One time he said to me: 'You will come to us some time, *Dulgokossa*, thou Long-Haired One, and you will point out the way to our lads.' Our fathers have gone; are we to carry on their work?"

"To the last drop of our blood," Dobry answered. "Tell me what to do."

She looked steadily into his eyes.

"Dobry, the Cause demands it of you. Stavry must be killed."

He met her eyes squarely; then he put his hand in hers. It trembled, but his eyes did not waver.

"It shall be as you say, Adalena. When?"

"To-morrow night?" she asked impatiently. "Every hour's delay may prove fatal."

"To-morrow night, then," he answered. "I think it will not be hard. The unmarried old miser lives alone with an old housekeeper who is deaf. Where can I send you news of the result?"

"I shall go back whence I came," the girl replied. "Follow the upland path to the left from Uncle Tosho's sheds, clear up to the highest point. Just before you reach the top of the El Tepe cliff-trail, turn into a goat-path that starts from a thrice-blazed *mura*-tree. It leads straight to the cave of Boyan the Hermit, where I have been staying. He has been like a—father to me. Let me know by twelve o'clock. After that I must leave. It is late already for the Uskub meeting, but I shall wait until twelve."

"I shall come myself if I can," Dobry answered. "But if that is impossible, then Mirko shall carry an icon. One of the Virgin all in blue with a cloudless sky for a background, and all is well. The other, it shall be vivid enough to let you know how things have gone."

The night-sky was turning to soft gray. Adalena tucked up her braids and pulled the cap far over her head.

"If anything delays you," she said, "leave the icon with the hermit. I may get the news more quickly."

"Does he know? Will he understand?"

"He knows all he needs to know."

She drew a dagger from her belt and held it in her left hand. Her right she laid on the blade.

"Once more, Dobry," she said.

He put his hand on hers, and together they repeated the oath of undying loyalty: "*While powder burns and blood doth flow——*"

She was calm and cool, but when he drew his hand away, molten fire was coursing through his veins. She put the dagger in place and went to the door. He wracked his brain for a pretext to detain her, but could invent none. A shyness, almost timidity, such as he had never known before, kept him silent.

She smiled, nodded good-by, and went away as quietly as she had come.

CHAPTER XV

DOBRY GOES INTO THE NIGHT

DOBRY threw down his paint-brushes and pushed his chair away from his easel. "I guess she will understand this message, if I fail," he murmured, surveying the canvas with grim satisfaction. "But will she ever know——?"

He stopped, walked over to the window, and gazed down the courtyard, bathed in the hazy twilight of early even.

"If I fail, she need never know," he finished.

From a drawer near the divan he extracted a portfolio of early sketches—youthful visions of the Phantom Princess, half-caught adolescent dreams which he was too shy to show to any one. He looked them over wistfully. Perhaps some day he would show them to her.

Some day—when Macedonia would be free! But in the meantime death was the task allotted him, not love.

He realized it was growing dark very fast, and his plans for the night were still indefinite. He pushed the sketches aside and paced up and down the room, lost in tense speculation.

"Do-bry!" Mirko's complaining, insistent voice roused him from his brown study. "Do-bry, *Bati Dobry*, why don't you open? Aunt Zora says supper will soon be too cold for pigs to eat."

Dobry unlocked the door.

"All right, little fellow," he said kindly. "And, Mirko, after supper I have something very important to tell you; but you must eat your supper without asking one single question about it."

The twelve-year-old nodded sagely. It always touched him to have his potential manhood recognized.

"I understand, *Bati Dobry*," he answered, and snuggled importantly against his brother. "Aunt Zora is a fine woman of course, but we men can't trust everybody with our secret affairs, can we?"

It was late in the evening when Dobry returned to the studio. His step was certain now; brisk, direct, determined. He looked over his tools of death once more before setting out—the long dagger with the wavy double edge, shining, eager, pitilessly ready. He pressed his thumb against both edges; the steel was chilly to the touch and razor-sharp. He laid it aside with a grunt of satisfaction, and examined his revolver. The six fatal messengers grinned leaden death at him.

"The steel first if I can—the less noise the better. But you may get your chance, sonnies,"—

he caressed the dull leaden fingers—"you may get your chance. And if you too fail, why then, good, fat brother, you will serve us all!"

Out of a small box he took a round iron bomb, wrapped in cotton swathings; made sure of the fuse, and deposited it in a pocket-fold of his dark red sash. Revolver and knife followed after it. He drew the blade again and again to make sure it would obey the slightest move of his hand, then he put out the light and stole quietly along the balcony corridor. The boards creaked in protest; Dobry moved still more stealthily.

He stopped for a moment before the window of Mirko's tiny bedroom.

"I ought to have told him more," Dobry thought. "Still, when he gets older he will fight. It is in his blood. He knows enough to tell Adalena of—of whatever does come out!"

He gained the street without attracting any notice. The town was dark. Only an occasional lantern or window-light broke in on the creepy night. Goreno men knew enough to keep themselves under lock and key after sundown.

But if the town was dark, it was by no means silent. The streets rang with the ribald songs of soldiers and *zaptiehs*, carousing, Dobry surmised, in Papaz Effendi's tavern. He met few owls. One, a Turk, swore at him; another wished him good health in frightened Bulgarian. Dobry answered neither, and moved on briskly, silently, like a man who was going somewhere.

Stavry's house was in the older section of Goreno, in a narrow little street jutting off the market-place. Dobry avoided crossing the square, lighted by the lurid translucence of dirty tavern windows; he slipped along tortuous byways into the narrow passage, scarcely more than an alley, and groped his way carefully to the doorway. The first floor was given over to the cheese and olive-oil shop which served the main purposes of a usurer's bank for the peasants of the Goreno region. The living-rooms were directly above.

A light still burned in the room nearest the stairway.

"The old scoundrel is up, anyway," Dobry thought. "That may make things easier."

He stepped into a deeper shadow to reconnoiter and form some definite plan of action.

A revulsion against the deed came over him. To kill a Bulgar in cold blood, even for Macedonia—— "If there only were some other way," he murmured. "If one could silence his tongue somehow. Ugh!" he swore impatiently, "there is only one way to be rid of cockroaches."

He left his hiding-place in the shadow of the house across the street, stepped boldly to the gate, and pounded the heavy knocker. He heard a chair pushed back, then Stavry's uneven stumping back and forth over the bare floor of the room above. From a window that opened overhead, the intruder heard in harsh, sleepy tones:

"Who's there?"

In answer Dobry gave a signal-knock. The limping thump descended the stairs, a key turned, and the door swung open, slowly, cautiously.

"It is Dobry," the guest said, pushing his way into the hall. "I've come to talk things over, Stavry."

Stavry put his sour, wrinkled face close to the youth's and peered keenly up at him. But the hall was dark, lighted only by a candle flickering in its socket at the head of the stairway, and he saw nothing alarming in his visitor's countenance. Dobry kicked the door shut and started upstairs.

Still, an uneasiness troubled his host. "It is almost bedtime, Dobry," he complained. "Couldn't you have waited until morning?"

"We have slept long enough," Dobry answered shortly; "Macedonia knows no morning."

Stavry was forced to follow him to the upper room.

Dobry glanced about quickly as he entered. It was a bare place, a veritable miser's den. Except for some trash piled in a dusty heap in the corner, only a rough table, a few chairs, and an old tin-stove covered the carpetless floor. A curtained partition led into Stavry's sleeping-room, barer if possible than the living-room. Behind these two, Dobry knew, were the housekeeper's room and the kitchen.

Dobry could hear no one moving; Stavry was evidently alone. The visitor threw himself on

a chair by the table and leaned his head on one hand, shading his face from the candle that sputtered in the center of the table.

"Now let's get the straight of that little business you came to see me about, Stavry," he began. Then he checked himself: "Are we alone?"

"All alone," Stavry assured him. "Martha has been snoring this long time."

Dobry breathed more freely. The dirty, greedy, hawk-like face before him sickened him.

"There is no use beating around the bush," he began; "you know all about our plans."

Stavry chuckled. "You won't find many layers of wool over these old eyes, my lad."

Dobry flushed. "They are blind eyes, Graybeard," he retorted, "if they cannot see that the money is not for our own use. When the revolution comes, it must find us ready. We need every piaster for arms, if we are ever to win."

"Come, come," Stavry sneered. "A man like Croom Dobreff, without an extra shirt to put on his back, isn't going to stick his head in a noose for the sake of two hundred thousand piasters, and then help you hoard them to buy gunpowder with."

"Hoard! Why, old fellow, not one piaster of that money has ever reached Gorenó. It has all gone where it is needed for the Great Cause."

The curtain partitioning the two rooms moved ever so slightly; three elbow-lengths behind Dobry's back, a dark, hairy face appeared through

a slit in the curtain. Two snake-like eyes glinted in the candle-light and watched the young man's every movement, glancing now and then at the money-lender with a knowing, reassuring look. Stavry, facing the partition, caught the glance but made no sign in reply.

"Dobry," the money-lender smiled as he spoke, "I am old enough to be your god-father, and yet you talk to me as if I were a ballad-humming moon-calf. The Great Cause! Great pumpkin-heads! What is the use of talking? I can't make any fine declarations about freedom, but I can tell you just this: Murad Pasha would pay me yellow gold for the story of the Krividol Gulch."

"Yes," Dobry hissed, "and squeeze it afterwards from you and from all of us!"

"Oh, I'll look after my interests, never worry," Stavry answered placidly. "I shall get my share."

"You shall!" Suddenly Dobry's hand flashed like lightning to his belt, but quick as a viper outspeeding the lightning, a dark shape shot through the partition behind him; Manio's claw-shaped hands grasped him by the throat and jerked him backwards. The icon-painter whirled; half-freeing himself from Manio's clutch, he made for Stavry, dragging Tosho's night-watchman after him.

"Stab him, you fool—stab!" Stavry shouted at the shepherd, all the while wheeling out of Dobry's way. But the stabbing business had appar-

ently no attractions for Manio; he was satisfied with holding the icon-painter back.

"Get out before you're killed," he cried at the money-lender. "Get out!"

Stavry saw the knife gleaming, seeking a place to strike. With both hands, he grasped Dobry's wrist, wrenched the knife from the icon-painter's grasp, and sent it spinning across the room. It buried itself in the boards of the opposite wall.

"Stab him, Manio!"

But Dobry jerked his right hand free and drew the revolver from his belt. His fingers sought the trigger; Stavry's eyes popped out of their sockets.

At last the shepherd was ready to act. Ram-like, he lurched against Dobry's knees, and the bullet intended for Stavry crashed through the ceiling. The impact sent the icon-painter reeling to the floor, Manio on top of him. Stavry jumped to the window and threw it open, shouting blood and murder.

Doors banged, opened; soldiers from a nearby tavern crowded in, ready for any sort of a riot.

"It is Dobry the Iconograph," a grizzly-faced villager gasped, pushing forward curiously. "What's been going on here, Stavry?"

The old man leaned heavily on the table, trying to collect his wits.

"He's a murderer and a thief," he cried, his voice high and nervous. "Out with him! Out with all of you! Away to the Pasha! Here's

the man who can tell where the Sultan's tax-money went."

"What's this?" Jemil Effendi exclaimed suddenly, shoving his way forward. "I guess this matter belongs to us."

The villagers slunk out of the room at the first opportunity, and the soldiers fell back, talking excitedly. Left free for a moment, Dobry struck a sulphur match and applied it to the black fuse projecting from his dark red sash. Stavry kept on explaining:

"He had come to murder me, Jemil Effendi, because I am a loyal subject of Murad Pasha and because I found out who robbed the tax-wagon."

"Tie up the cur!" the Turk shouted, "and off to the *konak*!"

Two *zaptiehs* made for Dobry; but the icon-painter was already up, smiling contemptuously.

"Hold on, friends," he sang out to them. "Don't trouble yourselves. We'll all go in a minute!"

The shining sphere of death spluttered in his hand; the Turks, fascinated, gazed at the short, curly tail; paralyzed with terror, they were unable to move. Manio crossed himself tremblingly, but the old money-lender burst out with an oath and grabbed for the fast-vanishing fuse.

"It is yours," Dobry cried, and glancing at the bomb to make sure, he hurled it at Stavry's feet.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RED SAINT GEORGE

THE next morning in the studio Mirko watched the clock nervously. His brother had told him to wait until half-past eight, then take the fiery red icon of Saint George up to the cell of the hermit.

He had never been there. It must be a long, lonesome climb, and what couldn't that hermit do to him, up there in the cave, or perhaps Turkish soldiers somewhere on the way! Still, he had to go; Dobry had said that the holy man could pray Mirko's soul straight to hell if he disobeyed. So the twelve-year-old waited, hoping every minute to hear Dobry's footsteps.

He unrolled the icon once more, and shivered as he looked at it. It was the oddest Saint George ever painted. Instead of the writhing dragon swallowing the gallant saint's lance in orthodox style, it had thrown itself across the horse, and the knight lay on the ground, torn by the monster's talons. Only the little princess was the same, running in terror along the cliff. Mirko was always fond of watching his brother's princesses in their escape. Whatever would happen

to this one, now that Saint George himself had been killed?

A quarter-past eight. The lad rolled up the picture and waited, cap in hand. The house was very still. Aunt Zora had gone to the market, and their servant girl had profited by the occasion to pay a kitchen-visit to a friend down the street.

Mirko listened. Yes, the street gate had swung open; some one was coming up. Hurried steps shook the balcony, nearer, nearer. Dobry had come at last! Mirko sprang to the door in relief, threw it open—and rushed against a Turkish *zaptieh*. Four others followed close behind. The man threw the boy against the door-jamb and pushed into the room.

The lad clutched his icon closely and rolled out of the way. Behind the table he scrambled to his feet, glaring hatred and defiance at the Turks. They were ransacking every nook and corner of the studio, jerking the pictures from the walls and ripping the carpets off the floor; but the search was fruitless.

"Where's the little pup we met at the door?" the leader cried. "I'll wager he could tell us where the papers are."

"I can't!" Mirko cried stoutly. "I don't know anything about anything."

"Don't play that game, sonny."

Tossun Effendi switched him into the center of the room.

"Maybe this will help you remember."

The second blow sent the lad reeling.

"But I don't, Effendi," Mirko gasped, choking his tears. "Dobry never lets me see things."

One of the *zaptiehs* had been tossing the pictures broadcast out of the window into the river. He exclaimed quickly:

"Hey, keep the pup. We'll use him later. Here we are!"

He held up a small water-color, painted on heavy paper. Running his finger along the edge, he ripped a second sheet off the back, so neatly pasted as to be almost invisible.

"Just happened to feel it," he exclaimed triumphantly.

The others rushed to his side: several closely written sheets and a drawing, evidently a map, were in the pocket.

"Look here, bub," the Effendi called, "what's this little picture we have found?"

Mirko wiped his eyes on his coat-sleeve and looked at the paper.

"I don't know," he said, dodging quickly.

Tossun Effendi unsheathed his keen-edged *yataghan*. He stropped it once or twice on his greasy pantaloons and ran the cold steel lightly across the middle of the boy's head.

"Do you know what we do with stubborn little warts? We slice them down fine, and then—zip, off they go!"

He let the sharp point travel down the lad's

spine, pressing just hard enough to cut his jacket. The boy screamed in terror and grabbed the Turk's arm.

"Effendi, don't—don't!" he shrieked.

"Do you think you know any better now? Look closely."

Mirko stared tremblingly at the paper. Finally he answered:

"It's a—a picture of the Krividol Gulch."

"Told you so!" Tossun exclaimed.

The Turks crowded eagerly. There was a long line, evidently the road, then various zigzags here and there, some ink-splotches, but no writing of any sort.

"Who drew it?" the Turk demanded. The boy's tears were dry. He was stubbornly silent.

"Who drew it? Speak!" The Turk began whetting his knife again. The child watched it gleam against the dirty pantaloons. He pressed his lips together closely. This time he would not tell.

"One, two," the Turk began. He pressed the blade on the boy's head, harder, harder. Mirko felt a sharp pain. He threw himself on the floor, grasping the officer's knees.

"Please, please, Effendi!" he sobbed. "It was not—it was—Dobry." The Effendi had to stoop to hear the name.

"All right, pup," he said, pushing him off with his foot, "we shall not slice you this time, but your wits must be quicker hereafter."

"But where's my brother?" the lad begged. "Where is he?"

"Your brother? Well," Tossun began, but a nudge from one of the *zaptiehs* made him change his mind. He laughed into the boy's frightened eyes. "Your brother has gone all to pieces on account of this Krividol Gulch robbery, pup. He'll need to be put together again. Unless you tell us all about him, some devils will have no end of fun with him."

"Something like this, you know." One of the men caught the lad by the foot. "They'll try to find out how he is screwed together."

He began to twist the boy's foot and leg. The child cried out again and kicked violently. The others laughed and the man let go.

Mirko staggered to his feet.

"But where is he now?" he persisted.

"I really don't know where all of him is," Tossun laughed. "If he were a Turk I could tell you." Still Mirko did not understand the ghastly truth.

"I don't see why the devils should torture my brother so," he sobbed. "He is not half as much to blame as that monk, his Holiness with the long name."

"Ho, ho! What's this? Maybe this little muskrat knows more than we think. What monk is it, bub?"

The twelve-year-old brain brimmed with a sudden idea.

"What will you do if I tell you? Will you let my big brother come back?"

The officer considered, grinning at his companions. "Well, now, I am not sure but that we would. In fact, I am quite sure the Pasha would be glad to exchange the monk, or anybody in fact, for your big brother. The Pasha was fond of your big brother, you know."

Mirko crept under the table and fished out his icon.

"See," he cried, "I was to take this to the monk up in his cave, if Dobry did not come back. I don't know where the cave is, but Dobry told me; it is up——"

"Look here, *zaptieh*," the officer interrupted, handing the papers over to one of the men, "take these to Murad Pasha. I'll get some help and we shall all go with this chick. I have a suspicion that we are going to catch some real gander this time. Now, sonny, lead on."

"But are you sure?" Mirko urged. "Will you let my brother free as soon as we get back?"

"He'll be toasting his shins right in this room half an hour after we get back to Goreno with your monk," Tossun assured him. "But if you don't lead us the right way"—he took hold of the boy's head and spoke through gritted teeth—"we'll cut Dobry's ears and nose and tongue and head one after another."

"Come along, come quickly!" A *zaptieh*

pinched the lad. He grabbed his cap and ran along the balcony. The others followed rapidly. It seemed to Mirko that the Turks were very slow climbers as he hurried ahead up the mountain trail.

CHAPTER XVII

THRICE AN ORPHAN

THE day had been one of fasting but not of prayer for Boyan the Hermit. The wild, lonely cave that had charmed him before was now oppressive beyond endurance. He wandered into the woods; a deep snow had fallen during the night and covered every trace of autumn. In the summer he always looked forward eagerly to the coming of the snow. He had symbolized it as a purging of the forest; now it was like a shroud.

He climbed to the topmost summit of the mountain, where the crest stood out, bald above the pines. The wind swept about him and waved through his thin cassock. All around peak rose upon peak. Elusive giants' hoods of impalpable snow mists they seemed to him; serene, cold, apathetic. Along the lower mountain slopes and down the valleys he could see the homes of men and women. Thin columns of smoke bespoke warmth, fireside joys, and good cheer. The deep snow of the mountainside seemed to melt away as it reached these lowland homesteads; and around

them the dark green of the pine-woods stood out unchallenged by the white gleam of winter. It was still autumn down there; all about him and in his heart blew the winter wind. Did it blow where she was traveling now? Was the snow deep across her path? Did the blast of loneliness chill her as it chilled him? Did she wish for the warm glow of the cave fire? Did she still scorn the eremite?

Boyan looked longest in the direction where Goreno filled the valley on both sides of the Ladna River and bulged over the mountainside. Was she there, or had she set out straight for Uskub? All day her eyes had haunted him: looking at him, piercing him through and through, weighing him in pitiless balances and condemning, scorning as a brave woman's eyes scorn a coward. He tried to remember how they had smiled during those two weeks; but scorn and contempt came back to mock him. In vain he thought of her warm look across the evening fire-glow; everything was chilly now. The wind whistled through the forest.

Boyan shook himself. He had consecrated his life to prayer and meditation, yet in this first trial he had fallen. Temptation of Satan indeed: it had made his life once more chaotic, it had robbed his soul of peace and put the old doubt in its stead.

Could Adalena be right after all?

No one knew the story of Turkish pillage bet-

ter than Boyan the Hermit. He was thrice an orphan by massacre. Amid the smoky turmoil of Grozno village, to the east of Adrianople, his poor mother had fought with death-pain and death-fear in giving him birth. The child was three weeks old when the news reached Grozno that the Russian army of liberation had crossed the Balkans and was marching on Thrace.

The joy of father and mother lasted a few brief hours, to be followed by the terror, the anguish, the agony of a wholly unprovoked Turkish raid from Kirk Kilisseh. Boyan's parents fled toward the Stranja hills. His mother Slava endured the journey in wagon and on horse-back bravely, but the pursuing Turks threatened to catch up with the fleeing villagers. Faster and faster the peasants fled, shedding their property along the way, to lighten their load and to gain time by delaying their hunters, as pursuing wolves are delayed by killed horses. Kitchen utensils, house treasures, sheep, oxen, wagons, all were abandoned in the mad flight,—and the horses galloped up the steep mountain-roads and trails.

But when the refugees reached the secure fastnesses of the Stranja, death claimed the victim saved from Turkish brutality, and a grave was dug for Boyan's pale mother under a Stranja pine-tree. Weeping peasant women mothered the babe, and burial chants sought the ear of God from the Stranja heights,—chants and prayers for deliverance, prayers and songs of joy, while

the Russian hosts swept in martial triumph across the plains of Thrace.

Boyan's father had fought alone, before the Russians heard of Bulgaria's woes. Now he left his son in a neighbor-woman's lap and went back to the plains to fight with those who fought to free the Bulgarian folk. He saw Adrianople fall; he saw Russian generals shake hands with Turkish pashas in sight of the minarets of Constantinople, and his heart glowed with the certainty of freedom.

But the Christian generals of peace scoffed at the victors of a dozen battlefields. At the Berlin Congress the Bulgarian land was chopped up into five chunks, and the chunk where Boyan had first breathed the groan-laden air of Thrace was handed back to the Red Sultan. Grozno was Turkish again.

The orphan-child's ceaseless cry tore his father's heart; for little Boyan's sake, he decided to marry again. His second bride, Nedelka, was so beautiful a girl that Grozno peasants wondered how the Turks had left her alone. Had the marriage been celebrated quietly or not at all, Boyan might have remembered a second mother;—but what perverse Fate sent Nedib Bey to Grozno on the very day of Nedelka's wedding, and directed a beastly gaze at the black wealth of hair, the long lashes, the soft plump neck?

Nedib Bey began with pleasantries: Would

the bride begrudge the newcomers a round of kisses? Stingy Nedelka! Amidst the panicky outcries of the wedding procession, heavy blows on the head left Boyan's father unconscious in the street, and the bride, strapped upon Nedib Bey's saddle, went where hundreds of her sisters, from the Black Sea to the Ægean, had gone before her, never to come back:

And at home motherless Boyan cried in vain for a caress which an inscrutable Destiny denied him. He grew unmothered. His father left the village after the lad could move about. From mountain to mountain they roamed, the length and breadth of Thrace and Macedonia. To Boyan's father every Bey was a Nedib Bey, and every Turk a Grozno raider. But vengeance did not bring back Slava to the father nor Nedelka to the orphan, and for each drop of blood spilt in the valleys, streams of Macedonian blood ran red after orphan and widower had escaped to the mountain fastnesses. New Slavas, new Nedelkas paid the price, and the more the brigand tried to pay the old score, the more the new scores multiplied. Turkdom cursed the mountain-rover, but it made innocent men and women and young girls pay the price. He, who had set out to avenge his and his country's wrongs, found his name anathema to Turk and Bulgar alike. The people bent their necks in dumb stolidity and cursed the fire-brand agitator.

He had scorned his life in a wild dash to save

a peasant girl's life near a village in the Kotchana region; to forestall a massacre, her father betrayed his hiding-place to the very same Turk who had snatched his daughter.

"Go away!" Boyan's father gasped as the youth bent over him for the last time. "There is no fighting chance in Macedonia. Alone we can do nothing. Go away, my son, and find peace."

Contact with an ascetic enthusiast had directed his course to this Pirin cave, an exile from the world and a stranger to all human interests.

"I have taken my vow, I shall not turn aside," Boyan the Hermit said firmly.

But gray-brown eyes, scorn-blazing eyes, and eyes warm and moist with love and hope undying, haunted the motherless, loveless heart.

The sky grew dull and leaden. Boyan ached with cold. He shut his lips grimly and set out for his cave: no fire should sparkle that night, he would do penance on his knees until morning. By that time he would know that his way was best.

In his eagerness to begin, the hermit ran at full speed down the slope and reached his rocky home warm and ravenously hungry. It was dark in the pines, and as he turned in the path toward the cave, he saw it lighted by a dim, friendly glow. Scarcely believing his senses, he rushed forward.

Before the fire, lying on one of the blankets that had served as partition, Adalena was fast asleep. Pushed slightly away from her was the empty kettle that had held the breakfast he had prepared so carefully in the morning.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HERMIT ANSWERS

BOYAN asked no questions. Where she had gone, why she had returned, all this was nothing to him. He knew only that she was there, in his cave, where he had first watched her and where he had never hoped to see her again. All notion of penance fled from his mind. He knelt beside her, enraptured with every feature, holding his breath lest he disturb her.

The storm outside was gathering; the wind rioted about the cave. He tiptoed across and laid a log on the fire, watching the flames shoot up and the light play over her face and long braids of hair. An irresistible longing to touch her, if only with his finger-tips, came over him. He remembered how his hands had tingled that first night and he had believed it was the fever.

She moved slightly and the blankets slipped from under her head, leaving it on the hard stone floor. Boyan drew another to him and folded it thickly. Carefully, lest he waken her, he slipped the improvised pillow beneath her head. She

snuggled her cheek against the soft wool, stretched comfortably, and gave a deep sigh. Her eyelids flickered, opened, and she looked up at him, her eyes misty with half-sleep. She stretched one arm out on the blanket and smiled, a slow, drowsy smile.

Boyan gasped quickly.

"Adalena! Darling!"

He dropped on his knees and lifted her face in his hands, his eyes thirsty, feverish, his lips whispering the prayers that the youth of man has never yet whispered to marble goddesses and Virgins lithographed. The candle before the holy image sputtered low in its socket. Mother and Child smiled benignly on the pair before the flaming pine-logs. The wind outdoors had stopped to listen, the woodland evening enveloped them on all sides in a veil of twilight mist, and the rocky floor of the eremite's cave was an arbor of love.

She trembled protestingly at first, but he held her firmly, answering each tremor with a kiss hotter, more passionate than the last.

"You are mine now; mine! Boyan the Hermit's! You are my goddess, you my Virgin, my love, Adalena!"

Evening nodded into night; the candle before the Holy Mother burned out; a bed of pine coals glowed drowsily, and the wind outside had quite died down.

Adalena ran her hands caressingly through his

hair, uttering not a word, lost in thought, in wonder, in all that makes a woman live, and suffer.

The last log crumbled into coals, and the flame went out. The complete extinction of light brought the girl to herself.

"Boyan, my lad, you have eaten nothing! I robbed you of your supper. Come, pile on some more firewood; I must cook you another. And you will need some rest to-night. Ours is a long road to-morrow—the road of freedom."

"The road *to* freedom, Adalena! I have an uncle who escaped to Bulgaria. There, in Sofia, no devil-Turks molest, no——"

"Sofia? Run away to Sofia—we two? And what of Macedonia?" She looked at him, puzzled, unbelieving.

He gave a gesture of impatience.

"Macedonia will be no worse for our absence; perhaps much better."

"Boyan!"

The girl pushed his shoulders back with both hands and searched his eyes. Her own were burning.

"Can you mean you would take me away from here, from our work? Can you ask this after yesterday, after to-night?"

"What is your work?" he asked bitterly. "I have lost every one I ever loved in just such attempts at revolt, and all to no purpose. You are the first happiness I have had in life. I will not give you up." He tried to take her forcibly.

"No." She thrust him away. "You are not worth it."

"Adalena, *milla moya!*" he pled. "Come with me, fly with me to freedom. Let us work for Macedonia from there."

"And our work would be—feeling sorry for those we leave here," she said scornfully. "Yes, that is work—for a coward!" Her voice trembled; she sprang toward the cave-entrance. But Boyan reached it first.

"You shall not!" he cried masterfully. "Not one step until dawn."

She stood a moment undecided, then turned sullenly and seated herself by the fire. Boyan came back and watched the dying coals from the other side. Neither uttered a sound.

Midnight had come and gone; the cave was dark; silence and warmth combined against the two and wiped out the deep-graven agony of their souls into a blank tablet of dreamless sleep.

It was broad daylight, and late; the sun shone brilliantly on the snow. The events of the past night crowded upon them. Adalena shook herself, and at the same time Boyan rose stiffly from the other side of the ashes.

"I think I had better have something to eat before I start," she said, trying to speak quietly. He came and stood beside her.

"You are going, Adalena?"

"Going."

She did not ask him what she craved to ask,

and he made no comment. They ate together. Then the girl went out and looked at the sun. It was well toward midday. She ran down to the main trail and searched the valley road anxiously. Nobody was in sight; she came back to the cave.

"Hermit," she said sternly, but her voice trembled on the word, "an important piece of work was carried out by the Comrades last night and a message was to be here for me by noon. I must not wait any longer. If it comes, will you keep it until we—until I can get it in some way?"

Boyan bowed.

"I shall keep it for you, Adalena."

She began gathering her possessions together. It was surely past noon. She must start. Yet she lingered. Boyan leaned gloomily against the entrance, now watching her, now staring into the forest.

"I can not," he kept repeating. "I—can not!"

She was ready to start, yet once more she stood before him, looking steadfastly in his eyes. Her hand lay pleadingly on his shoulders.

"Boyan, *will* you not—come?"

"Adalena," he answered, "you think me a coward. If I believed in your cause, life or death would be indifferent to me. But—I know I am right. What you attempt is futile. I have caused all the massacres I am going to cause."

Her cheeks flushed with the humiliation of another failure.

"Fare thee well."

But he clasped her in his arms fiercely, pushing back her face.

"Once," he said passionately. Though she shook her head in refusal, he pressed her lips hotly to his own.

She struggled away. Without looking back, she went straight out through the forest, avoiding the familiar goat-path and, cutting across the *détour* it made, headed directly for the Struma valley, Uskub-bound. Her face burned hotly as she stumbled on over the snow-covered stumps and branches.

Boyan stood rigid in the doorway, watching the spot where she had disappeared among the trees.

A boy's voice roused him:

"There he is! Didn't I tell you? Now let my *Bati Dobry* come home."

The twelve-year-old was running breathlessly up the path, followed by four Turkish officers. Boyan turned quickly to meet them. They seized him roughly.

"What have I to do with you?" he asked in bewilderment.

"Never mind about that, slippery-tongue. We know who you are," one of the Turks snarled at him, trying to slip the handcuffs over his wrists.

"But I don't understand!" he insisted, struggling to free himself.

"Oh, yes, he does!" Mirko danced excitedly

first on one foot and then on the other. "He is the very same Holiness with the long name who was at my brother's. He looks like him, anyway, even if he has grown a beard since then."

A light broke over Boyan. They were looking for a leader—a leader who wore cassock and hood. His struggles gradually grew less. They bound his hands securely.

"Now, come along." Tossun Effendi yanked him forward while the others ransacked the cave.

"I'll come all right," Boyan retorted, and the new, strange tones of his voice startled him. He seemed to hear his rebel father shouting defiance at the very teeth of his foes. "But be you a little careful how you act. The leader of a whole people can't stoop to talk to yellow pimples like you."

Tossun Effendi's face purpled with anger. His hand trembled on his sword; but—the hermit-monk was right. He dared not strike yet.

The procession went down the path. Mirko tagged, hopeful yet anxious. Finally he tugged at the last Turk's coat.

"Effendi," he begged, "will my brother surely be home soon?"

The Turk shook him off roughly.

"Are you still here, you little bit of vermin? Didn't we tell you your cur of a brother went all to pieces last night? Yes; blew himself to bits and killed Stavry the money-lender and a few

sons of Allah besides. Now, off with you, or I'll send you after them. *Psst!*"

The lad's blood froze. And he had betrayed his Holiness! The loss of both his honor and his brother was too much for the twelve-year-old. He threw himself face downward by the side of the road, sobbing bitterly.

CHAPTER XIX

“TAKE ME TO CONSTANTINOPLE!”

IN THE court-room of Murad Pasha consternation reigned. Not in the memory of the oldest Osmanli in Goreno had a prisoner faced the justice of Islam with such an arrogant disdain, such an almost condescending pity toward those who could spin his destiny any way they pleased, as a street urchin spins his top.

The news that the *bash-komitaji*, the master-rebel, had at last been captured traveled far and wide: this unexpected success, following promptly on the tragedy at Stavry's house, wrought confusion among the Comrades, added an elbow-length to the stature of Tossun Effendi, and subtracted from the almanac of Murad Pasha at least twenty winters. At last he would show those who had tried to pull wool over his eyes that he was the same old wolf who had in days gone by made the Shar uplands resound with terror.

All the prominent Turks in the Goreno district were on hand for the preliminary examination. It was a distinct local “occasion.” Hence coffee

and sweets were in order, and Christian maidens a-plenty were forced to wait on the Mohammedan dandies, to lend color and style, *saltanat*, to the ceremony. Murad Pasha was a good host, the Turks all agreed, with unquestionable taste in beauty feminine.

The greater, therefore, was the disappointment of the assembly, come to gloat and scorn and punish, when the prisoner, instead of begging for mercy and cowering in despair, faced his judge with an air of breezy contempt, as if the Pasha of Gorenno were beneath his consideration.

The first shock of it took Murad by surprise and distinctly embarrassed him. The peasant maidens, heretofore waiting in pale trepidation on the Turkish dignitaries, seemed suddenly to gain self-confidence and looked defiantly at the leering, smirky Osmanlis sipping coffee on the low divans. But Tossun Effendi, who had led the chained captive into the room, borrowed courage from the obvious discomfiture of his chief and, recognizing his opportunity, gave Boyan a vicious kick.

"What airs are you putting on, you black-head? Do you think you are the garlanded bridegroom at a wedding feast? Look down at the floor, and bend that neck of yours or I'll break it!"

Murad Pasha regained his composure, glared severely at the *bash-komitaji* before him, and began his examination in high, stentorian tones.

"Name?" he thundered at him in Turkish.

"*Bezimeni*, The Nameless One," the hermit answered in calm Bulgarian.

"A madhouse name!" Murad Pasha spat in disgust. "Surname?"

"The Sultan and I need no surnames," the prisoner replied.

"Where were you born?"

"Eh?" The monk seemed surprised at the question.

"Where do you come from, you lunatic?"

"Oh, from the huts of shepherds and uplanders and valley-men," Boyan recited in liturgic style, "from a thousand villages and hamlets, from field and river-bank and mountain-pass——"

"*Sst!*" Murad burst out in a round of mouth-filling profanities. "Whom do you know in these parts?"

"All good Bulgarians and none."

"What passport do you carry?"

"Macedonian."

"You lie! There is no Macedonian kingdom."

"There will be one presently."

"You don't know in whose presence you are!" Murad swore.

"You do not know to whom you are talking," the prisoner calmly retorted.

"Have you ever been tried before?"

"By bunglers of your standing? Never."

The Turks looked at each other in utter stupefaction. Had he been a sheep-hearted shepherd,

he would have been kicked into needless submission twenty times over; but even Tossun Effendi's rage had subsided. As for Murad Pasha, the cool, sneering composure of his victim seemed to fascinate and hold dominion over him. The one-time fruit-peddler recognized his master; he felt increasingly with every question that the rebel of rebels stood before him and he determined to keep his temper until he had coaxed, wheedled, or forced a confession.

"You are a *serbes*, irascible insurgent," he said in frank admiration. "Sign your name here."

"I can't write it in the language of tyranny!"

"Then write it in the language of liberty," Murad sneered.

"That language you can not understand—yet."

Murad took up another cue.

"What is your trade?"

"Ridding the land of weeds like your Excellency," Boyan bowed.

Tossun Effendi shook his fist, but Murad waved him off.

"Did you rob the tax-wagon in the Krividol Gulch?"

Boyan smiled.

"I did," he answered.

"Alone?"

"No, I had helpers."

Murad leaned forward.

"Who were they?" he asked.

Boyan smiled more broadly still.

"Oh, the stupid Turkish guards you sent with the money."

"Who was with you?"

"The God of Justice. Are you acquainted, Graybeard?"

Murad winced but proceeded.

"How did you rob the wagon?" he questioned.

The hermit drew himself up.

"That," he said firmly, "that I can not disclose to Albanian thieves like the Pasha of Gorenno. No, nor to hawk-eyed, wolf-jawed Kurds like Akiff Pasha of Uskub. No, nor to flabby, floursack-heads like Abdul Pasha of Salonica. My story is the story of a whole people. Do you think I shall trust a noonday robber with the secret of a nation?"

"Torture me to death," he continued warmly; "my story dies with me—and you will pay dearly for the loss of that story, Murad! I hear you have boasted of my capture, and sent a message to Akiff Pasha about it. Akiff is your superior; he will order you to send me on to Uskub. Yet Akiff Pasha will learn no more from me than you have learned. Only in Constantinople will I speak. Only to the Sultan will I tell my story. Take me to Constantinople!"

CHAPTER XX

THE THIRD WIFE

IN Murad Pasha's harem sunshine mixed with music and the low chatter of women. Three of the wives played cards; the fourth, who was really Murad's third, lay on a low divan and looked on in scornful silence.

A toy Pomeranian puppy nosed his way uncertainly about the loose folds of her silken gown and tried to lick her face. She shook him off, but rubbed her cheek fondly against his long hair when he whined. Slave girls crooned in low melancholy minors as they swayed rhythmically in the dance or played soft airs on zithers and gipsy harps. At the door two broad-shouldered, black-skinned eunuch-guards gazed expressionless in the distance.

The room, the common living-room of all the Pasha's household, occupied half the second floor of his long, rambling palace, overlooking in front the main street of Goreno, and at the rear the Ladna River with the Pirin Mountains beyond. No curtains obstructed the view toward the river, but the windows over the street were heav-

ily latticed. By these windows Mihirmah, the third wife, lay in a mass of rich purple and brown cushions—a picture to fascinate any male heart, and intended for just that purpose.

Her hair, so deep a brown as to be almost black in the shadows, lay in heavy masses over her head and shoulders, and shaded eyes of an even more deceptive brown. The creamy pale yellow of the loose, shimmering veil, caught at the waist by a gold-embroidered girdle, clung about and only half-concealed her figure. A languor, alluring even in repose, made her slightest gesture voluptuous, and added to her beauty an elusive suggestion, something that enticed while it held back, and promised what it would not reveal—a cold intimacy and a most appealing disdain.

Yet beneath the dreamy sensuousness of her Oriental grace a blood of restless abandon pulsed unceasingly. Her eyes roved about unsatisfied; she was a huntress compelled to play the wrong *rôle* in the chase, and therefore ill-content with those before whom she fled. Had Mihirmah's soul inhabited a man's body, chained hundreds would have crept behind her chariot of triumph. All the instincts of the conqueror clamored for expression within her; but she was a woman, with only men to conquer, and Destiny, which handed her over to Murad Pasha, denied her even the joy of conquering her master.

Educated for the harem of the Sultan Abdul

Hamid, she had been given to Murad Pasha in lieu of the governorship of Uskub, for which he had petitioned. He accepted her perforce and amused himself for a while with her beauty, but treated her as an uncoveted prize. He was already in love with the young Zayleh. The reign of the belle from Constantinople in Murad's harem was all too brief and left her thwarted, cheated of all her heart had desired, oppressed by one unrelieved *ennui*.

To-day the news had gone about that Murad Pasha was trying the *bash-komitaji*, a handsome monk, and that the Pasha would march him about the town before locking him up in jail. It promised to be a diversion at least, and Mihirmah had stationed herself by the windows to watch for the first appearance of the cavalcade as it wound down the street.

The waiting grew tedious; the amusements of the other wives angered her. She scorned to join them and they hated her for it.

"It is your time to shuffle, Zayleh," Fatma, the first wife, cried, laughing gaily. She had just won a round and was in high spirits. Mihirmah pushed aside her pillows and sat erect.

"Will you never stop this nonsense?" she said. "How can you keep at it a whole afternoon!"

"And why shouldn't we, Thunder *Hanoum*?" Fatma retorted. "I'm sure it is as much fun as lolling about with a dog and ruining one's clothes."

"Let her be," Zayleh tossed the cards with supreme indifference. "Of course she treasures the puppy. It is all Murad Pasha ever gave her.

"Come here, Ali Bey," she called to her toddling two-year-old. "Come, give your mother a kiss." The sturdy lad ran up and threw his arms about her neck with infant impetuosity.

Mihirmah shoved the dog to the floor and went to the end of the room, choking back her tears of rage and mortification. Zayleh did not know how deeply she had cut nor how many nights Mihirmah had prayed on the cold floor for the gift that Allah denied.

A bugle sounded. The wives abandoned their cards and ran to the windows, peeping from behind the curtains. Mihirmah waved aside a bunch of little slaves and reserved one lattice for herself.

"Allah multiply Murad Pasha's offspring," the wives and women-slaves cried in chorus.

But it was a miserably short procession and did not come prancing on as expected.

"Why," the youngest wife commented wonderingly, "I don't see the Pasha's white horse at all!"

"It isn't there," Fatma answered, "and Murad himself is not there." She gave a cry of delight. "But Selim is—my Selim is riding at the head." She pressed more closely to the lattice.

The interest of the others waned. Zayleh even left the window and began playing with her baby. Mihirmah did not move. There was something

peculiar about the order of the procession that roused her curiosity. Selim Bey rode haughtily at the head; she could easily distinguish his cruel, dissipated face with its complacent smile. Behind him half a dozen *zaptiehs* followed. Then the lines separated, and between them walked a solitary man in hood and cassock, his arms bound behind him. The double lines closed again in the rear.

Selim's mother's attention was quite taken up with watching her adored firstborn. Mihirmah knew that for once she was unobserved. Boldly she pushed aside the lattice that obstructed her view. The shutters gave, and Mihirmah looked down unscreened on the horsemen riding stolidly by.

The prisoner looked about him in proud unconcern. His eyes wandered over the palace above the outer wall—wandered, stopped. Eyes that shot star-fire caught his eyes and held them.

It was just one moment, but for Mihirmah it held a lifetime. Her face burned scarlet; she drew back involuntarily.

Aisha, her life-long nurse and slave, shut the lattice and drew her mistress away. "*Hanoum!*" she protested.

"Aisha!" Mihirmah caught the withered hands in both her own. "He is the handsomest man I ever saw—and a *giaour* holy man, a monk!"

"*Ssh!* Hush, little rose," the old woman whis-

pered. "They will hear you. Remember the master."

"But he—the prisoner! Oh, Aisha——" She checked her tongue, but her eyes glowed with passion.

"Selim Bey will see his mother, Fatma *Hanoun*," one of the black eunuchs announced.

CHAPTER XXI

DELILAH

THE woman bowed low. Fatma ran forward, crying out in delight. It was not often that Selim Bey troubled himself to visit his mother. He waved his hand in lordly greeting to the other wives and submitted indifferently to his mother's caresses.

"There, there," he said, shaking her off. "That will do. Let me sit down. Beastly hungry."

She led him to a divan and seated herself beside him, now and then stroking his face, patting his knees, and crying out at his beauty and the style of his uniform. When his lunch came he pushed her away, and she devoted her attention to urging food on him, alternately praising its quality and scolding the slaves that it was no better.

"What brought you here alone, Selim?" she asked him. "Where is the Pasha?"

"Oh, he's recovering from the chagrin of his trial, and a pretty mess he made of it, too. I didn't hear it, but——" he broke off. "Those

Bulgar mules need a tighter rein," he finished.

"What is it?" his mother cried in alarm. "Is it about that explosion? Have you had to fight?"

"Fight?" Selim smiled. "Well, a little! One's life is worth about fifteen paras in Gorenó; that is, outside of this harem."

"Selim!" Fatma nestled closely to her beloved child.

"The brigands robbed the tax-wagon, you see, in the Krividol Gulch, and now only the money planned for the summer harem is left. I suppose the Pasha will have to send that to Uskub instead and you ladies stay here next summer as usual."

A chorus of protesting womankind interrupted.

"We won't," Zayleh declared. "Murad Pasha promised me I should surely have a new palace by next spring."

"Afraid you must wait a while longer, baby," Selim teased.

Zayleh was younger than the son; indeed, Murad had considered marrying her to his eldest before he himself became infatuated. Selim treated her with a freedom he never exercised toward the other wives.

"You can't make a palace out of straw, and the Pasha has squeezed all the money he can from the district. Our only hope is to get that two hundred thousand. But how this is to be done the Pasha will never know until he learns how to handle wily Bulgars. That monk, for example—— Did you see him?"

"How could I see anything but you, darling boy?" his mother purred.

"I saw him." The voice was rich and vibrant. "Who is he?"

Selim looked up, then swore under his breath. The Sultan's gift to the father had always fascinated the son. The complacent epicure of Gorenno felt the glamour of a hundred Stamboul *seraglios* in her every gesture, but it was far too elusive, too subtle a glamour for Selim. Mihirmah knew her power over the rustic Lothario, but she scorned the conquest. What joy in vanquishing a heart that succumbed to any pretty peasant girl's coarse red jacket?

"Whom did you see, beautiful one?" asked Selim.

His eyes roved over her, sense drunken but unsatisfied.

"That was the *bash-komitaji*, the Nameless One he calls himself, and his lordly manner has quite checkmated the old Pasha, judging from what I heard about the trial. I wish I could have a try at the high and mighty black-cap. Before I was through, either I would know where that money is or he wouldn't be able to tell. Then I'd build a harem of my own perhaps. You would call on my wives; eh, beauty?"

"If they were worth calling on, I might, perhaps, do it," Mihirmah answered—"when you were not there."

His face crimsoned, but even Murad's first-

born did not dare go further. Mihirmah strolled leisurely from the room.

Selim finished his lunch and yawned with sleep.

"I'll be going," he said. "In a couple of days perhaps I shall try my luck around Krividol Gulch."

"Must you go there?" his mother asked anxiously. "It is cold up among the mountains and these peasants are so—troublesome." She held him back.

"It will be good hunting. There will be flocks of little birds that will need a keeper when the nests are torn up."

He laughed at his joke. His mother assumed a puzzled look; he laughed again at her pretended innocence, chucked her under the chin, and left.

In the dim hallway, old Aisha slipped out of her corner and bowed herself to the floor before him.

"My mistress, the gracious Mihirmah *Ha-noum*, sends greetings to Most High Selim Bey and will he lend his honorable presence for a few minutes in her humblest of sitting-rooms?"

"Show me the way," he cried in eager surprise. Aisha ran ahead. Selim followed quietly and quickly.

Languidly reclining on a feather-cushioned divan, Mihirmah watched the door, alluring, expectant. The shimmering transparency of her face-veil revealed and accentuated what it was in-

tended to conceal. A face unveiled was never half so enticing.

Selim entered hastily, closing the door behind him, and bowed low, hesitating to advance. Mihirmah's eyes, ignoring his, focused musingly on the eunuch squatting by the door on the inside, whom Selim had not noticed. He turned on him squarely and pointed to the corridor. The man scrambled to his feet, but did not go.

"Murad Pasha's orders," the eunuch protested.

Selim laid his hand suggestively on his sword.

"Murad Pasha will not be here for several hours," he said between closed teeth. "I am master now."

The eunuch almost fell through the door. Selim closed it and quickly approached his father's third wife. She motioned him to a chair near by. Selim Bey trembled; never had he been so near this woman. She leaned forward slightly and looked at him through lids half closed in reverie.

"The *bash-komitaji* made a fool of the Pasha?"

"So they say." He was obviously surprised at her question.

"But he does know where the money is?" she continued.

"Doubtless. But what do you want?"

Instead of answering she leaned back on a cushion of turquoise-blue, against which the

brown waves of her hair fell in maddening disarray. The sunlight from a latticed window played about the sheer gauze veil. The least suggestion of a blush tinged the creamy whiteness of her face; her lips burned red as fire. She spoke slowly, never looking at her visitor.

"If you could wheedle the secret out of him, it would be worth while," she mused.

"H'm!" Selim grunted.

"But the monk is a proud hero. He will scorn your trial even as he scorned your father's," she continued.

He moved about uneasily. Her whole body spoke a distinct and different message to his conceited sensuality. He regarded her conversation as a mere pretext on her part; and yet—could this woman desire him whom she had appeared to scorn? He tried to catch her eyes, but she looked above and beyond him in the distance; only her lips burned the deeper red.

"If I had that monk for a few minutes or longer, I should know his secret."

"Perhaps you would," Selim agreed. "But I don't see how you could ever have him."

She laughed tauntingly.

"Selim Bey is resourceless in his father's palace?"

A smile of challenging scorn curled her lips. For Mihirmah knew her man.

"Resourceless? Bah! I could carry you off, every one of you, if I chose."

"But you are reluctant to have a woman assist you to that treasure of two hundred thousand piasters?" she mocked.

Selim snatched for her hand, but she eluded him.

"Here," he cried brusquely, "why do you want to do it?"

"To break this utterly unendurable monotony," she answered. "My blood tingles, adventure-mad; I am dying here of *ennui*."

She yawned in weary tedium and stretched her arms above her head. The loose sleeves fell back over her shoulders; her lips pouted disappointedly, tantalizingly; a frown clouded her brow; her eyes fixed upon a point just above his head, but Selim could not bring them down, try whatever artifice he would.

"Look at me!"

He spoke passionately, but she made no response, waiting.

"Well, I'll arrange it and let you know this afternoon," he concluded, and bent quickly over her. "To relieve this day's *ennui*——" he began; but she slipped past him and clapped her hands. Aisha entered.

"Selim Bey would leave my apartment, but he is not sure of his way out," Mihirmah said calmly.

The old woman salaamed profoundly.

"I shall guide the honorable Bey," she answered.

Selim hesitated; then he followed the old slave.

Mihirmah watched quietly until the door closed. When the footsteps had quite died away, she walked up and down the room, clasping her hands in exultation.

"Before to-morrow night I shall see him!"

She locked the door, pushed her veil away from her face, and gazed at herself in the long mirror, her fingers gripping the sides of the frame.

"I'll have him at my knees," she whispered.

"He can not resist me. He—*can not!*"

CHAPTER XXII

THE FRAGRANCE OF HYACINTHS

THE sun peeped gingerly through the cobwebby, iron-barred hole into a small rectangular cell with a bed of clammy, packed mud and only a small colony of cell-mates crawling over the walls—a cell clean and right comfortable as cells go in the land of the Turk.

The prisoner lay immobile, worn out, apathetic—or perhaps absorbed in deep meditation. Boyan had read his Turkish captors aright. His first exhibition of the lofty manner, in front of the cave, had been half accidental; its complete success with Tossun Effendi had encouraged the hermit to play a consistent part to the end.

He had nothing to confess, but the assumption of haughty refusal impressed the sons of Islam, ever used to expect submission from their victims. Where stolid, stupid obstinacy, moreover, was punished with barbarous torture, his lordly inflexibility had compelled an increasing self-respect. The Turks treated him as a petty sergeant treats a general whom the fortunes of war have made

his captive. He was actually imprisoned in the best cell available in Murad Pasha's jail.

One other idea lent him strength and steeled his courage; as long as he was the "master rebel" Adalena was relatively safe. She was probably out of the Goreno region by now, Boyan meditated, crossing some snow-bound pass, afoot or ahorse across some valley, perhaps stopping overnight at upland villages, preaching revolt. Perchance some one else rode beside her. He brushed aside a taunting memory; he could have been that some one.

Did she still scorn? Would she condemn the *bash-komitaji* of the Goreno jail as she had the eremite of the cave of dreams? Something seemed to have severed all the threads that connected him with the hermit of the Pirin cave. His knees would bend no longer and, try as he might, the words of prayer and litany had forsaken his memory.

Live things crept about his ankles and scuttled from under his palms. He felt around for the possible bread-crust or crock of water left behind by some Moslem prisoner, for he knew Turkish prison methods too well to expect any himself before he had confessed.

He searched the floor carefully, and though he found no water, his hands finally fell on a chunk of hard bread. He felt it over, shook off a wriggling forager, and scraping the surface a little with his finger-nails, carried his find back to the

clay corner which his body had dried if not warmed. He was famished, and his sorry meal only whetted his hunger.

Chills ran through him; the utter misery of the cell was revolting, and a double sense of abhorrence mixed with terror came over him as he thought of Adalena. Perhaps some day she would be in such a cell. The idea led to others that made him shudder as he thought of Turkish jails and jailers.

The door swung open; the dirty glare of a lantern flashed squarely in his eyes, and the long, hound-like face of the jailer frowned above it.

"Come," the Turk said gruffly.

Boyan followed him through the maze of passages to the prison-gate; the fresh air gushed in as the iron doors opened, and brilliant sunshine burst all about him. Two soldiers stepped up, chained his hands behind him and led him off. From the rough stone of the prison passages they came into finer corridors, then on to polished wood and carpeted floors. The soldiers paused before an open door and took off his chains.

"Go in," they ordered, and locked the door.

Boyan stood in the center of the room and looked about, puzzled. It was evidently a sitting-room. Heavy, soft-colored tapestries hung on the walls; a wide, yielding divan with puffy cushions stretched beneath the latticed window, and the foot lingered on silken rugs of luxurious thickness. Through the voluptuous fragrance of hya-

cinths, which hung heavily in the air, a suggestion of womankind pervaded the room.

In an alcove, shut off by portières drawn aside, a steaming dinner was set for two. The whole thing was so unreal, so much like a page torn from the *Thousand and One Nights*! Boyan walked to the table and touched the browned fowl with his finger-tips.

"This is real, anyhow," he laughed aloud, and the next minute the ascetic of the Pirin cave was lost to all that extended beyond the reach of knife and fork.

A man physically ready for any emergency stepped from the table and turned to test the reality of the couch that invited to slumber. For when one has passed with open eyes from Oriental squalor to Oriental luxury, the gate of dreams yawns wide open.

A strange cloud of hyacinths was all about him. A presence elusive, seductive; a soft, silken rustling seemed to lull him and rouse him all at once. The swish of a veil caressed his cheek. He shook himself half awake.

A woman sat beside him, wrapped in a mist of wavy blue. As he opened his eyes she stretched her arms over her head and rested her palms at her neck. Boyan closed his eyes, then looked up once more. She was still there. A smile of idle contentment, and a desirous smile, played about her lips, all ready to speak. The eyes sparkled, burned behind long shading lashes.

"You have seen me before?" she asked him.

Boyan heard himself answering:

"Once, at a window over a balcony."

"How strong you are, and handsome, and noble!" she whispered low and bent over him.

A memory, the most important of all, hovered about the fringe of his consciousness, but his eyes were still heavy and the blue cloud of hyacinths enveloped him, ravished his senses, banished his reason.

"How can you die so young?"

"Die!" Boyan repeated.

"You are lost beyond recovery—and I am so near."

She touched his eyelids softly with her fingertips.

"Don't you think I am beautiful?"

"Beautiful," Boyan murmured.

His head sank back on the pillow; his eyelids felt deliciously heavy beneath her caresses. She leaned nearer, closer; he could feel the warmth of her body coursing about him, her breath against his cheek, the soft folds of her sleeve about his neck. A wave of fire swelled, rose, engulfed him. Her hands clasped his and pressed them closely to her lips.

Was it the touch of her lips that roused him? Eyes that knew no languor—dark, compelling eyes—looked at him. Cool, strong hands pressed his own. Instead of whispered caresses he heard——

"Ours is a long road to-morrow—the road of freedom."

With all his strength he pushed her savagely from him and leaped to his feet.

"Temptress of Satan!" he hissed. "So this is your Turkish trick to wheedle out my secret. And you call yourself a woman!"

She struggled upright and stood beside him. Baffled where she had been sure of victory, she now crimsoned with rage.

"You are an upland brute." She gritted her teeth. "Why—I loved you. Do you know it? I love you this minute!"

"Love!"

He laughed in scorn.

"What do you know about love? You are—a pretty animal. There is no soul in you."

"You lie!" she cried. "You lie like a Moslem. They all say we have no souls. They make us slaves of their passions, but we conquer them. You cast me off, but I shall conquer you."

She clasped him by the shoulders, her body a-tremble with fury. He struggled desperately to escape; her arms were blue with the pressure of his fingers.

"What are you?" he cried in distraction. "What would you have? Do you know what it means to be a woman?"

"Tell me," she answered. "I would sell my very soul for one minute of freedom and power."

"Let go your hold, then. You are a serpent, fascinating. I can not think when you hold me."

She dropped her arms, breathing heavily. Boyan drew back and studied her carefully a long time. At length he spoke to her quietly.

"There is a woman in our mountains," he said. "She is younger than you, stronger, finer, more beautiful, and she has given up everything for the freedom of the people. Love, happiness, luxury—all this is nothing to her. She has forgotten her youth and beauty for the sake of old, wretched Macedonia. She has more manhood in her than ten men, and therefore she is the more womanly. She does not pray, but her every thought contains more religion than a whole monastery of murmuring monks. Men, women, and children wait for her, bless, worship her. You must give, not sell, yourself if you desire freedom."

"You mean——" Mihirmah said slowly, wondering. "I must forget I want it?"

"Forget it and earn it," Boyan answered.

"But how——"

A sudden idea made every atom of her body palpitate. She caught his arm excitedly. He jerked back.

"*Bash-komitaji*," she whispered, "I know how I shall win freedom. I shall free you and escape myself."

He looked at her intently.

"You can not."

"I can," she answered in quiet pride. "Listen. I was to entice you, conquer you, then wrest your secret for Selim Bey. I wanted to win you; he consented for your secret."

She lowered her voice, speaking faster.

"He may be near, listening, watching. Pretend you yield to me. Lead me to the divan; talk to me."

He was distrustful, bewildered. "What do you mean?"

"Put your arm about me," she ordered, "and trust me. It is all you can do. I—I am different now."

As he drew her to him, she raised her voice somewhat, caressing his face with her hand.

"If you do love me as you claim," she said, "then tell me of your people, of your plans for freedom, and how you will get money for the revolt."

He shoved her away.

"I have nothing to tell you," he muttered. "I will die rather than be so false."

She understood him only as playing his *rôle*, drew away from him, and crossed the room, apparently chagrined.

"Then you will never see me again!"

She looked back and half held out her arms, expecting him to rush to her. Boyan looked at her one moment, then buried his face in the divan.

When she threw back the curtain that concealed the entrance, Selim Bey stepped into the opening and looked keenly at the man on the cushions, then at the woman.

"Well?" he asked.

CHAPTER XXIII

AN OPEN DOOR

THE night had been doubly raw, the clay floor clammier than ever, and a more dismal gloom enveloped the prison cell. The events of the past day haunted Boyan like visions from ghostland: freedom had knocked at his door, and he had scorned to receive her.

Keys jangled uncertainly at the lock. Boyan listened intently. Some one was trying one key after the other and becoming more impatient with every trial. At last, with a vicious jab, one of them slipped into the lock and turned; the door creaked as the one outside pushed on it, and yielded slowly. A dim ray of light from a dark lantern flickered over the wall; Boyan could distinguish a black figure behind it. A candle-eye sought him uncertainly. At last he heard, in a somewhat shaky voice——

“*Bash-komitaji*, aren’t you here?”

He gasped in amazement.

“You! Is it you? How did you ever get to this hole?”

"Selim Bey allowed me one more trial. I persuaded him to let me come to you here. Nameless One"—she came to him and caught his arm—"let us escape from this awful place."

He drew aside, astonished.

"Who are you? And how can we escape?"

She clasped his arm again.

"Mihirmah is my name. I am the Sultan's, a gift to Murad Pasha, and my life is weary in this palace. Promise you will take me with you, and I will help you escape."

"But how? This is madness. If we could get away, you could not bear the journey. We should only be recaptured."

Boyan spoke in gasps. Even as he discouraged her, his heart beat high with the madness of new-born hope.

She was sanguine.

"Oh, yes, we can get away. But promise; will you take me with you?"

Boyan hesitated—and yet it was his only chance.

"Well?" she asked anxiously.

"I shall do my best to protect you," he answered.

Stifling a joyous cry, she hung the lantern on the door-knob so that the light would fall on them both. She threw off her veil and a long, black mantle.

"Leave your cassock here and put on these," she ordered. "I am dressed in Aisha's clothes.

With this charcoal on my face—see—we shall deceive them all.”

She held the lantern so that he might see. In the dusk her disguise seemed perfect, but Boyan wondered how it would look in the daylight. She arranged the mantle about him and draped the veil closely over his face.

“Be very careful and keep close to me. Don’t let your shoes show. In the harem they think I am off to spend the day. Selim Bey expects me to visit you this afternoon. If we can get in my carriage, which is waiting at the court, we’ll have four or five hours’ start. Now, are you ready?”

Boyan took a step and lunged forward.

“Don’t walk as if you had a cassock on,” she cried. “This cloak must be long, so your shoes won’t show. Move this way.”

She paraded before him in a gliding, sweeping step.

“Now try. Don’t kick! Slip your feet along, but don’t shuffle.”

She smiled up at him, her hand on the door.

“One word before we go, my Master Rebel. I am saving you because I love you. I am going with you because I love you, but not as I loved you yesterday.”

She stopped, waiting, hoping he would answer. Her heart beat wildly; her fingers trembled on the door-knob. She touched his hand through the long folds of his sleeve.

“Do not answer,” she said. “I know you do

not love me. But tell me this. Do you trust me?
Say you believe in me."

Slowly his hands closed over her own.

"I must believe in you, Mihirmah."

She pulled the door open. They stood together in the corridor.

CHAPTER XXIV

THROUGH THE DOOR

THE dim gleam of the night-lantern guided them uncertainly down the dark corridor. Mihirmah went first. One turn after another led off into mysterious, mazy passages. At one corner they heard groans and cries—low, as if coming from a great distance.

"I wonder who it is?"

Boyan paused. The woman shrugged her shoulders and hurried on.

The passage ended at a heavy iron door. Together they fitted a key and stepped out into a hall, bright with the morning sunlight. At the right of the entrance the door of the jailer's room stood ajar, and inside at the table the old Moslem himself nodded over a half emptied cup of coffee.

Mihirmah stole to the table and laid down the keys. Boyan waited motionless in a shadowed corner. No one guarded the hall, but the court outside was full of noisy soldiery.

"Come this way," the woman whispered. "We don't want to meet any more of them than necessary."

She turned to the side into a narrow passage and out under large archways that connected the inner with the outer court.

"We must cross these arches to the hall beyond," she said. "That leads to the women's outer court and we shall find the carriage in front of it. Our real danger is there."

Glancing about hastily, they started under the arches. Mihirmah grabbed Boyan's arm convulsively as a loud cry just around the corner startled them.

"You donkey-eared duck-foot!" a coarse voice roared. "You impudent calf-head!"

Two soldiers in hot pursuit of a third dashed into the entry. All three saw the tall, veiled figure hurrying across the passage and came to a quick stop.

"Hello there, pretty one," the first of them called. "What's the hurry?"

"Don't mind them, gracious *Hanoum*," Mihirmah imitated Aisha's cracked tones. "They dare not touch the flower of Murad Pasha's garden."

"Hist!" whispered the other two soldiers. "This is no pasture for us to graze in."

Mihirmah pushed the door open and shoved Boyan inside.

"Don't stiffen like that," she scolded. "You can't fight here. Be limp. And don't pay attention to any one."

Here, too, the hall was empty, but there were voices in the rooms near by where slaves ran

about, their sandaled feet patting the bare floors. Boyan noted only that the floors were polished and the walls highly decorated, for he dared not turn his head. Suddenly Mihirmah shoved him into a dark doorway.

Three slaves bearing large platters of fruit on their heads came pattering down the hall, singing a gay snatch of song as they ran along. The two waited until a door closed on the fruit-bearers. Then they sped on. A large portal opened into a court full of flower-beds, with here and there a fountain, straw-wrapped for the winter. Mihirmah led Boyan behind a pillar.

"Wait," she whispered, and ran away.

She was gone only an instant, but it seemed ages to him. When she returned, she was carrying a heavy shopping bag.

They passed the portal and crossed the deserted court. Above them was the window where Mihirmah had stood when she saw Boyan for the first time. Her heart pounded as she wondered if any curious eyes were looking through the lattice now.

Two eunuchs waited at the gate. They opened mechanically, noticing only the tall, veiled figure, and prepared to follow, but Mihirmah motioned them back and swung the gates together herself. They stared in stupid wonder, but she did not pause.

"Praise be to Allah!" she breathed as she saw the carriage drawn before the gate.

The horses stamped restlessly, eager to be off;

the coachman, a withered old eunuch, blew his hands and paced up and down to keep his feet warm. He hurried to assist his mistress, but Boyan had already stumbled in. Mihirmah sprang after and snapped the latch.

"Drive to the Buk Beechwoods, and be quick about it," she ordered in black Aisha's own fashion.

The old man asked no questions. He whipped up the horses and the carriage sped away.

Above, in the common sitting-room, Zayleh saw it go.

"Well, we're free of the Thunder *Hanoum* for a few hours," she muttered spitefully.

Old Aisha crouched in Mihirmah's private sitting-room, waiting anxiously for her darling's return.

"I ought not to have left her at the entrance," she mumbled again and again.

She waited one hour, two. She could stand it no longer.

"I am going to Selim Bey," she groaned defiantly. "He must find her and give her back to me."

CHAPTER XXV

THE ROAD OF FREEDOM

THE carriage jolted briskly over the cobblestones. The noise of the wheels made talking impossible. Mihirmah tried to make Boyan hear, but he cautioned her to silence. Pulling the bag beside her, she produced a package of cakes and a small bottle of coffee from its depths. Boyan accepted them and ate ravenously.

As his appetite decreased, his hopes rose high. Suddenly he stopped, ashamed of his greed. He held the remains of the cakes, but the coffee had all disappeared, and he could only look ruefully at the empty bottle.

"You have had nothing," he said.

He had thrown the veil from his face while he ate, and though she could not hear him, she guessed the words his lips formed. She shook her head, laughing, and went on winding a veil about her head in Aisha's most approved style, criticising it closely in the glass door of the carriage.

"I am not hungry and there are more." She patted the bag suggestively.

As the carriage turned into the lane skirting

the woods, the horses slowed to a walk. Mihirmah pulled a couple of shawls from under the cushions and put one over her shoulders. She made a tight bundle of the other and gave it to Boyan.

"Keep it under your cloak," she said. "It is light, but very warm, and we shall need it later."

He took it and held her hand closely in his own.

"You are a wonderful woman," he murmured.

She flushed warmly. It was his first hint of praise and she accepted it with childish joy. She did not remove her hand and he released it of his own accord.

The grounds were wild and thick with underbrush, but the leaves had fallen and left the place barren and desolate. Mihirmah rapped on the front window of the carriage. The old eunuch stopped the horses and climbed from his seat. He stuck his head inquiringly at the door.

"The honorable *Hanoum* will walk," Mihirmah ordered. "After that she will go to the shops and then to Zulaika *Hanoum's* for dinner. You shall call for her there at four o'clock this afternoon."

She turned to follow Boyan, who was sauntering slowly ahead.

"Say, Aisha," the old man asked cautiously, "what is in your throat? Your voice is so hoarse this morning."

"Go 'long," the woman commanded crossly,

"it is the frogs. They always hop into my throat in these wretched Macedonian winters." And she hurried after her mistress.

The old eunuch shook his head. This was strange conduct and he could not understand it, but his mistress Mihirmah often did queer things. He climbed on the box and drove rapidly away, glancing back now and then at the receding figures.

When the carriage was out of sight, Mihirmah threw out her arms and drew a long, deep breath.

"*Bash-komitaji*," she cried, "are we free!"

In his suppressed joy he was almost stern. "We are a long way from freedom," he said, "but we have a fighting chance. These clothes will be in our way."

He examined the place about them. They stood in a secluded bend where the woods skirted the winding Ladna River. With a sigh of relief Boyan threw aside the veil and mantle and looked at her.

"See," Mihirmah said, "I am ready for the mountains, too."

She threw off the loose cloak of the slave and waited for his comment.

Boyan cried out in astonishment, for he saw a peasant girl before him in loose blouse, short, thick skirt, woolen stockings, and heavy shoes. She laughed at his surprise.

"I got them in the market yesterday," she answered him. "I had to hurry."

"How did you think of it all?" he gasped.

"I have read much—novels, romance."

Her eyes danced with delight at his evident admiration.

"I have dreamed wild dreams. The harem games were so stupid; I wanted one worth the playing, and because I was dying of *ennui*, I sought amusement in books. I can speak your language, too; I learned it from a slave-girl Murad Pasha brought us."

"*Bozhe moi* (My God)!" he marveled.

"And such a woman can come out of Turkey!"

"But hurry now," she begged.

"Mihirmah!" He spoke sternly. "I accepted your help, not because I wanted life and freedom for myself, but that I might learn how to die for others. You also crave freedom. Because the riotous blood pulses in your veins, you think you love me."

"I know I love you, *Bash-komitaji!*"

"Well, I know I do not love you. Listen, this is brutal; but I am not a courtier and I respect you enough to tell you the truth. You are just at the gate, you can turn back."

"Oh, let me be your slave, *Bash-komitaji,*" she burst out, her passion for him undampened by the humiliation of his words. The less attainable he proved, the more ardently she desired him.

"Do you know where my path leads which you wish to follow?"

"It leads to happiness, to joy——"

"It leads to the gallows, or worse. Can freedom mean that to you? See, even yet you can go back."

"I have cast my lot with you," she muttered.

"And if the road proves too hard for you, and I push ahead nevertheless, and leave you behind?"

"The jail-guards will be after us before long. Come, do let us hurry." She stamped with nervous impatience.

Boyan shrugged his shoulders, rolled her cloak and his own trappings into a tight bundle, hunted along the bank for a stone, and tied it to one end of the long veil. Creeping to the water's edge, he flung the bundle far out into the river. It floated but an instant; they watched the circles widen and lose themselves in the current.

"There are no tracks now," he said. He picked up the bag, wrapped the shawl about it, and slung it over his shoulder. They started at a rapid pace to an old bridge some distance off. Across the bridge were the hills, forest-covered.

The wind blew cuttingly, but neither of them heeded the cold. Mihirmah felt all the energy of a mountain-peasant surging through her. She rubbed the charcoal from her face as they hurried on; her cheeks glowed through the soot. Even Murad Pasha would scarcely have known his beautiful, languid, troublesome gift-wife. And for the first time Mihirmah forgot herself and her own loveliness.

They gained the bridge and crossed it, to all appearances a young peasant couple on their way back from town. The path led sharply over the hill. They climbed rapidly, Mihirmah panting for breath. Just beyond the crest the way divided; one led toward the north, the other west.

"This way," Boyan said, turning west.

"But why not north?" Mihirmah argued. "Bulgaria lies north, and freedom is there."

"Because I say west now."

He had used that tone once before, when he had cast her aside in the palace. She followed without a word, but her heart felt sick with misgiving. She noticed suddenly how cold the wind was as it swept down the mountains.

An inability to explain to her the objective of their journey oppressed Boyan, but he could not bring himself to utter Adalena's name to this woman, and his admiration for her pluck only increased that inability. All his joy in freedom was swallowed up in his passion to reach Uskub without delay, find Adalena, and work for Macedonia. He set his teeth and hurried on.

Mihirmah watched him and followed. The whole bearing of the man ahead of her was compelling. She had dreamed of holding men captive, of molding them in the palm of her hand like soft wax; to her voluptuous womanhood that had been the vision of consummate bliss.

Now she thrilled to the heart with the love

of one who had trampled her pride in the dust but had seen in her a human being. She tried to fall into his own swinging stride and keep abreast, but he remained slightly ahead, and inch by inch she felt she was losing ground.

CHAPTER XXVI

"ONLY A PIASTER"

"*B*ASH-KOMITAJI, listen!" They had pushed on steadily for several long hours, with only a minute snatched now and then for rest, and a noon meal eaten as they walked. Mihirmah's muscles were stiff. The pressure of hard, heavy shoes on feet which only embroidered sandals had ever before housed was unendurable.

Over and over again she was on the point of crying out in her exhaustion to hide somewhere and rest, but each time his set head and broad, grim shoulders silenced her. And she shambled on, across gullies and hollows, up winding goat-paths, over rocky defiles where every stone bruised her feet—always straight ahead and always westward.

The early zest of the journey had vanished; she followed with a determination as dogged as his own. Her limbs worked automatically. She felt no resentment at his utter disregard of her weariness, but crept after him, afraid to stop lest her feet lose the trick of keeping in his rhythm.

Slowly Mihirmah grew aware of a low beating, coming in a measured cadence, as it seemed, from somewhere back in her head. At first she enjoyed it; it helped her to walk faster.

But her rhythmic beat grew louder, louder, gaining momentum at every step until she despaired of keeping pace with it. The faster she walked the faster, more insistent came the throb that seemed to shake her very brain.

Mihirmah's apathy suddenly vanished. She turned her head and stood perfectly still. The beating did not cease; it was not in her head. *Thump, thump*; she heard it distinctly on the hard road—the unmistakable sound of galloping hoofs.

Boyan marched steadily on, unaware of anything but the mountains in front. She ran after him, all her weariness gone.

"*Bash-komitaji!* They are after us!"

He stopped, turned around, and bent his ear close to the ground. The gallop came with increasing distinctness on the clear mountain-air. Boyan knew they were Moslem troopers; no Macedonian peasant's horse could go at that rate. His heart sickened. He looked eagerly ahead in search of some thicket or bypath that would offer concealment.

Their pursuers were evidently in the hollow behind them, since the horses could scarcely keep such a gait climbing. Until the Turks reached the crest the fugitives were invisible; after

that the entire road would be in plain view.

Mihirmah held his arm, watching the hilltop, fascinated. Boyan felt her tremor as she clutched his elbow.

"You must save us both," she kept repeating. "You must save us now."

His face was grim. "We must hide, but God alone knows where."

The woods on each side were all beech and maple and oak. Their gray, gaunt limbs swayed mockingly, every protecting leaf scattered over the ground. Not a cedar or hemlock relieved the winter bareness.

"The whole mountainside is like a sieve," Boyan groaned aloud. "They can see in every hollow clear to the valley. But come, it is our only ghost of a chance."

He took her hand and they stumbled into the thick leaves and among the bushes. Mihirmah noticed that the galloping had ceased.

"I can't hear them," she whispered. "Maybe they have turned."

"They are climbing the hill," Boyan muttered between set teeth. "Mihirmah, do you know how to die?"

"Oh!"

"Then they——"

But Mihirmah had lost her step; her foot slipped, turned sharply, and she fell forward into a little hollow almost filled with leaves. He

reached to lift her as she struggled in the leaves, then quickly pushed her back.

"Lie still," he hissed, "and hold your shawl over your face."

Then he began piling the leaves over her, heaping, smoothing, working in a perfect frenzy.

"But you?" she cried. "Oh, don't leave me!"

"Be still!"

He threw an armful over her head.

"And don't move until I tell you."

She twisted slightly and lay quiet. Her wrenched ankle throbbed. The load over her got thicker. She held the shawl closely to keep out the stifling dust. At length the rustling stopped and something heavy and stiff fell lightly over her.

"He must be piling logs on now," she half-smiled in her terror.

An irresistible impulse drove her to discover if she could move anyway. Boyan's voice answered her first rustle, a low, hoarse, desperate voice.

"For God's sake or Mohammed's, woman, lie still! They are at the top."

The words froze her into obedience. Her muscles grew rigid. She held her breath, so intently was she listening. Boyan's quick movements had stopped. She could still hear him move about, but slowly and haltingly, and now and then twigs snapped or one thicker than the rest broke with a slow crack.

The sharp gallop of horses drowned even this.

Then all at once it too stopped, and a hoarse voice called out:

"Say, Grandpa, have you seen anything of a young couple around these parts?"

The leaves crackled rapidly. Was the *bash-komitaji* running away or going toward them? A voice, so thin and quavering that she had to think twice to recognize it, whined out:

"Allah multiply your wives, Effendi! One piaster, one little piaster for old Antim's dinner!"

A whip hummed. Mihirmah heard a weak cry——

"Effendi!"

"*Sst*, you old carrion, answer up this minute: have a young man and woman passed here?"

"A man and woman?" the voice whimpered in halting Turkish. "No man and woman come to hunt old Antim. Nobody comes here."

"Has any one passed, I ask you?" The Turk swore. "Has anybody gone by?"

"Gone by? Yes, yesterday Yani the shepherd, going to Goreno, he said. And two old goats like me—do you know them?—Stilian and Petkana of Dobridol village, passed last Wednesday. Wouldn't tell me where, the old goats, and——"

"Nobody to-day?" The Turk cut him short.

"To-day is the day of Saint Nedelia; of Saint Nedelia and Saint Petka!" the cracked voice crooned in Bulgarian.

"Can't you see? He is out of his wits," an-

other Turk yelled. "Come on, let's turn back to the valley-villages."

"One little piaster!" the beggar-voice whined.

"Here's one," some one sang out. Again the whirr of the whip and a cry of pain mingled with hoarse laughter.

"Warm him up. Try your shooting-eye on him as he runs!"

Instantly a rifle cracked; there was a shrill scream of anguish and something fell to the ground. Mihirmah, terrified, grit her teeth to keep from crying out.

"Save your bullets, you fools," another voice shouted gruffly. "No telling how many we'll need before we are through."

The horsemen galloped away.

For an eternity Mihirmah lay still. The beat of the hoofs grew fainter and fainter. Was the *bash-komitaji* dead? Allah, why didn't he move? She dared not stir, but every atom of her being quivered in agony and she was almost suffocated.

A twig snapped; leaves rustled above her. With a sweep her load was pushed away and Boyan kicked aside the branches he had piled over her to hold the leaves.

"Mihirmah!" he cried. His voice shook with joy. "We are saved."

She stared at him. His jacket was off, his shirt torn until his body was bare to the wind. His hair was gray with the dust from the leaves

and his face and hands dark with grime plastered over his skin. He had rolled up his pantaloons and his feet and legs were bare and dirty. Across his face and over his right shoulder two long welts were swelling. The blood oozed out of the cuts. She sat up, still staring, uncertain whether to admire or pity.

"But the shot?" she asked anxiously.

"Your Turks are poor marksmen," he laughed, pulling on his shoes and socks. "If he had aimed at the tree instead of at me you might have had to go on alone."

She shuddered at his jest.

"I have an idea," he went on. "We shall carry bundles of fagots on our backs, then if the curs meet us, they'll think we are only wood-choppers going home."

She struggled to rise, pulling herself up by a little birch-tree. Every movement was agony. Her muscles refused to work.

Boyan was stamping up and down, warming his feet. When she tried to come to him, she crumpled in a heap on the ground.

"Carry wood?" she moaned. "*Bash-Komitaji*, I can not even walk. I can not!"

He bent over her.

"Just a little farther, Mihirmah," he begged. "It is all down-hill now. We shall surely find a house where you can rest."

He helped her up and they went slowly forward. It was a snail's pace and every moment

was precious. In his nervousness Boyan increased their speed, hoping to limber her muscles.

But the Turkish *hanoum* was no Bulgarian mountain girl. Every step was torture; her twisted ankle pressed against the shoe until she thought it would burst. Her eyes grew filmy. She lunged, face forward. He barely caught her.

“Go on,” she moaned, leaning on him. “Go, and leave me. I should have known better. You call this freedom, but for me it is only death. I can not go farther.”

He lifted her in his arms and went slowly down the mountainside, feeling his way carefully in the darkness.

CHAPTER XXVII

KISMET

THE wind rose. It grew colder every minute, and not a star in heaven! Thick, gray clouds, snow-filled, rolled across the sky. The road ahead lost itself in a dense-black valley.

"Are you very cold?" Boyan asked.

"I am freezing," she answered faintly. "I didn't know there were such cold winds in all the world. Can't we find a shelter somewhere?"

He strained his eyes, looking for some gleam in the darkness. The road turned sharply to the left, then bent again to the right, but, in the middle of the horseshoe curve, Boyan thought he saw an opening in the forest. The woods were thick here—groves of spruce and hemlock so black that the opening was like a gulf of gray yawning before them. Boyan stood Mihirmah on her feet and studied the lay of the land beyond the opening. She hobbled after, fearful of being left alone even for a moment. The endless stretch of woodland, the untamed sweep of the wind through it, filled her soul with a dread intolerable.

"We are near a shelter," Boyan said, coming to her. "Across the next ravine are the sheepsheds of the Seven Well-springs. We shall be welcome there."

He took her in his arms once more and started. How very light she was!

The road was scarcely more than a broad path, but it was well cleared, and the autumn rains had washed it smooth. It wound along the mountain-side, down into the dark ravine, and up the opposite slope. After a fifteen minutes' climb they came out into a well-marked clearing. A group of cabins huddled together in the center of it. From a window in the largest a light gleamed, flickering but warm.

A watch-dog began barking furiously from the back of the clearing. Others joined in. A heavy log door opened carefully: old Tosho's figure stood out in the light. Yana peered curiously over his shoulder, holding over her head a pine torch that threw out uncertain rays across the doorstep and the court in front. Behind them the fireplace, filled with logs, shot its flames up the chimney.

Boyan led Mihirmah forward. When the door opened the dogs had stopped barking, but they still growled threateningly. One of them came into the light and stood there, bristling and defensive.

"A good friend of yours, Uncle Tosho. Can you take us in for the night?"

A door opened near the fireplace. Ivan the Huntsman came into the room and listened carefully.

"These are uncertain times," Tosho returned, "but you seem to know me, friend. How many are there of you?"

"Two, and one is a woman dying of cold and hunger."

"Give me the torch, mother," Ivan said. "His voice sounds familiar, and anyhow we turn away no Bulgar on such a night as this."

He stepped past the old man and swung the torch over his head.

"Come into the light. Be quiet there," he ordered the dogs, who growled more fiercely as the two approached.

"Holy thunders—you?" Ivan exclaimed. "Mother, Boyan the Hermit is here! How in Heaven's—— But come in!"

He took them into the cabin and bolted the door. Boyan led Mihirmah to the fire and put her on the wide chimney-seat. She shivered continually and huddled closely to the warmth. Old Yana's curiosity gave way to pity.

"The poor little lamb," she said, "she is frozen through. In a minute we'll have something hot for you."

Mihirmah lifted her great, dark eyes to the kindly face and smiled faintly.

Yana swung a half-emptied kettle of soup nearer the fire and brought out slices of white

cheese and a loaf of bread. Boyan threw himself on the seat opposite Mihirmah and rested in the warmth.

The old mother roused the two, urging the steaming soup on them and filling their glasses with fresh milk. They ate ravenously. As he gained strength, Boyan's plans cleared.

"Ivan," he began, "I know what question hangs on your lips. A month ago when I saw you last, I could not have dreamed of meeting you again—thus."

"So many things have happened since last month that one can believe anything," Ivan remarked. "But what brings you here?"

He looked inquiringly at Mihirmah.

"A brave woman is your guest, Mother Yana. Mihirmah *Hanoum* is escaped from Murad Pasha's harem in quest of freedom. She saved me out of prison, and a pack of Turkish dogs are after us."

"Saved you out of prison? When were you arrested?" Ivan cried out. "I have just returned from the border. You come direct from Gorenno?"

"Yes. I am the '*Bash-komitaji*' whom Murad and his men have been trying so solemnly." Boyan smiled. "Even Mihirmah insists on calling me so!"

"Your Holiness a *komitaji*! Since when?" Tosho asked incredulously. Mihirmah had

closed her eyes and dropped off to sleep on the chimney-seat.

"The real *bash-komitaji* came wounded to my cave after the Krividol Gulch affair," Boyan began.

"Where is she now?" Ivan interrupted.

"Wait. She honored me by seeing a possible leader in me, but I saw no fighting chance in Macedonia and preferred to keep on mumbling my prayers. Our leader went to Uskub. Hardly had she gone out of sight when a troop of *zap-tiehs* came up to the cave to arrest her."

"And you gave yourself instead; played her part!" Ivan concluded admiringly.

"My trial convinced me that only our indecision makes Turkey strong. United, inflexible, defiant, we could hold our own against the oppressor. And my captivity taught me not to ask God and the Virgin any questions which I myself could answer. So here I am, Uskub-bound, to work with her for Macedonia's freedom."

"But this wife of Murad's?" Yana asked.

"In my way? So she is, good Yana, but she has led me out of prison and I feel honor-bound to protect her as long as she can follow. She is going to Bulgaria and then to Europe, I suppose, where she may find the free life she craves, after she has learned that she does not really love me."

The sudden furious barking of the dogs and the gallop of horses brought them all to their

feet. Rifle-shots quieted the barking for a second, while loud voices yelled:

"Open up, cur of a shepherd! Open up this minute or we shoot!"

Ivan rushed to grab his rifle.

"There are a dozen of them, son. It's no use," Tosho said, and turned to the door.

As the noise burst in the room, Mihirmah leaped to her feet, frightened, and clutched Boyan by the arm. Her face stood out in the light. Selim Bey's voice rang out:

"There they are, both of them! Keep watch around the house, *zaptiehs*, the *Bash-komitaji* is here!"

He leaped from his horse and rushed into the room with half a dozen of the Turks.

"Bind them all," he ordered, "and bind this peasant girl securely," pointing to Mihirmah.

It had all happened so quickly that the Bulgars stood dazed, but Mihirmah came forward.

"Selim Bey," she said, "you shall not bind us. And you shall not touch these peasant folk, either!"

"Who are you, to give yourself such airs?" Selim shouted.

"You know who I am, even if your *zaptiehs* do not. But I tell you this: I gained access to the cell of the *bash-komitaji* because you wanted to learn his secret for your own profit. If you bind us, or if you touch these shepherd folk, Murad

Pasha will learn some things that will cost you dearly."

Selim Bey was taken aback.

"Well," he compromised, "so be it, but come along quickly. Akiff Pasha of Uskub has sent orders to have the *bash-komitaji* despatched to him for further trial as soon as possible, and your apartment is waiting for you. Murad Pasha hasn't found out yet that either of you two are gone, but he may any minute."

Tosho held back his rebellious Ivan.

"Wait, my son," he whispered. "Bide a better chance. Here we can not oppose them. Remember your mother, remember Irina and the other children."

Mihirmah shrugged her shoulders. "It is *Kismet*," she said. "But my ankle is hurt. I can not manage a horse myself."

"Ride on my saddle," Selim offered eagerly.

"No." Mihirmah drew herself up proudly. "No, hero of uncombed bazaar-beauties, I'll never share a saddle with you. For once in my life I shall ride with the man who gave me the only taste of freedom I have ever had."

She turned to Boyan. Never before had the broad-shouldered, massive mountaineer seemed so little the monk and so much the born leader. His clothes, torn and dusty though they were, had a certain native, half-wild grace which gained by contrast with Selim Bey's elaborate foppery. The stronger, simpler man was prisoner, but his failure and recapture had not cowed him.

The Pasha's son blustered importantly. Boyan said not a word. Overpowered by numbers, unarmed, he faced his captor with a cool, smiling defiance which thrilled the Turkish woman. To the unsatisfied daughter of Stamboul seraglios this son of the craggy highland was a prince of romance.

"*Bash-komitaji*," she said—but he seemed not to hear—" *bash-komitaji*, I go to my living grave in the harem of a brute; and you—Allah knows where! But tell Akiff Pasha—I have heard of him in Stamboul—tell him that the wife whom Murad Pasha got instead of the governorship of Uskub loathes the very sight of Murad and of his son, and loves you—you—you!"

She threw herself at Boyan's feet and clasped his knees in a paroxysm of unrequited passion.

In the early morning hours, Ivan the Huntsman set out cross-country for Uskub.

"Adalena must hear of this. She will doubtless stop at Demeter the Schoolmaster's, and she alone will know how to save Boyan before he reaches Akiff Pasha's jail." So he had reasoned, and his old parents agreed with him.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MERCHANT FROM SALONICA

ON a typical Turkish road—a winding rope of a road, a black ditch full of sticky, ropy mud—skirting the lower western slopes of the Malesh mountains a well-dressed and therefore foreign-looking young man rode on horseback, Uskub-bound. Two puffy saddle-bags hugged the horse's belly, and also protected the rider's neat trouser-legs from the spattering ooze through which the animal navigated.

The road was almost deserted. The horseman met and nodded cursory greetings to several peasants returning from Shtip, the nearest town on his way, but no one caught up with him.

It was somewhat late in the afternoon when, crossing the pit of a mountain hollow on his descent to the Shtip valley, the young merchant overtook a moss-covered old native doing his profane best to goad a team of antediluvian buffaloes into locomoving. The well-dressed city man suppressed a smile and greeted his road fellow cheerily:

“*Pomozi Bog* (God help you) !”

It is a form of salutation characteristic of a race and country that has been in distinct and desperate need of divine assistance for some half a thousand years.

The buffalo-driver gave the horseman a sudden, startled look. Then, evidently reassured by the merchant's appearance, he bent forward hospitably.

"*Pomozi Bog!*" he answered. "Yours is a faster beast than mine," he commented, plying the goad industriously to stir the buffaloes to life, "but you are as lone a traveler as I. Whither bound?"

The merchant brought his horse alongside the cart.

"To Uskub, grandfather," he answered.

"You're a brave young chap, dressed as you are, to be traveling so far alone."

The old man peered sharply into the rich merchant's face:

"We grow old while we are yet young in Macedonia," the other replied.

The peasant gave one of the buffaloes a vicious prick and laughed bitterly.

"Macedonia has no youth. Children are gray-beards before they are men. You are a Bulgar? I know it by your tongue."

"A son of the Pirin uplands," the merchant answered, "back from a visit. It was many winters since I had seen the old hut."

"Are you a peasant born?" The old man

was incredulous. "You look so prosperous—moneyed—polished."

He surveyed the evolved village son admiringly.

"You must be a Protestant," he concluded, but crossed himself Orthodox-wise notwithstanding. "Tie your horse to the wagon and ride a ways."

"You must excuse me, grandfather, but I am late as it is," the merchant replied. "I must reach Shtip before sundown."

He lifted his cap, touched the spurs to his horse, and vanished around the next bend.

"The young ones are restless these days," the peasant mused. "There is no time to talk any more."

He pricked the off buffalo, which seemed to be slower in responding to the goad's suggestion, and blew his nose loudly.

"But he was a handsome youngster," he added, "almost as pretty as a maid."

The rider reached the top of the last upland slope. He rested the horse from the long climb; then took the descent to Shtip at a quick trot and alighted before an inn at the edge of the town.

An officious porter, followed by an obsequious host, hustled out of the gate. The merchant nodded to a stableboy, who loafed expectantly about the courtyard, and walked briskly into the dingy office. The boy almost hurried in his zeal

to stable the fine gentleman's horse; the porter lugged in the saddlebags.

"I want a good, clean, warm room, if you have such," the merchant told the landlord.

"Yes, sir, yes." Doncho the innkeeper rubbed his hands importantly. "Tasko, put my own room in shape for the guest."

Such customers as the merchant were obviously not usual at Doncho's inn.

"You are traveling from afar, sir?"

"From Salonica." The curt answer discouraged further conversation.

"Landlord, send three fried eggs up to my room. I don't care to eat with this rabble."

He jerked his gloved thumb scornfully toward the eating-room, reeking with tobacco smoke and noisy with the clatter of unbreakable wine glasses.

"Indeed not." The host echoed his patron's aristocracy. "All shall be made comfortable for the gentleman."

"A heavy merchant, that," suggested a town idler, straining his wine through his mustache, while he watched the city man stride up the stairs to his room.

Tasko had just started the fire in the little tin stove, and was bobbing his way out, when the landlord entered.

"The gentleman will pardon my disturbing him," he began, "but it is necessary for me to record his passport."

"To be sure. Stupid of me to forget."

The merchant went through his papers, selected one, and handed it to the landlord.

"Send some supper at once," he said.

Early in the evening the light in the front chamber was out and the young merchant, fully dressed, slept soundly behind a locked door. Nothing disturbed his slumbers; it was six o'clock when he awakened. He pounded at his door and called for breakfast.

"And tell the boy to feed and saddle my horse at once," he ordered the porter. "I must be off directly."

But instead of Tasko, Doncho himself returned, profuse with apologies.

"I am sorry to say, *Gospodine*, that something seems wrong. The town *kaimakam*, Midhat Bey, will not accept your passport and has sent a *zaptieh* to take you to him."

"Oh, bother!" the merchant snapped in irritation. "How can things be right when half of these town *kaimakams* don't attend to their business! Where is the *zaptieh*? I'm in seven devils of a hurry."

The landlord shook his head sympathetically as the city man strode away with the orderly.

The Government *konak* at Shtip was old and dingy, but its disorder was that of use rather than neglect. In other days the low, square audience room had been fitted up with some pretense at luxury, and the former county magistrates served

coffee to their early morning guests on low tables and smoked lazily as they swapped local gossip.

Midhat Bey had changed things completely. He was a short, swarthy Arab with keen, deep-set eyes and a chin as square as a bulldog's. His temper was also of the bulldog variety. He dressed plainly, even carelessly, scorning luxury of any kind. He had one absorbing passion, a passion outlandish in Turkey—the fulfillment of his duties.

To be sure, Midhat was ambitious, and it may have been that while he attended to business with one watchful eye, the other was fixed on the governorship of Uskub, the goal of all Turkish officialdom in northern Macedonia. Still, the first eye kept the Shtip District in better order than that which obtains in most of the Sultan's mismanaged provinces.

When he came into power, one of his first acts was to sweep away all the frippery of his predecessors. The artistic coffee tables were replaced by rough desks, littered with papers; the divans by wooden benches, where Midhat's callers waited his leisure in uncomfortable, coffeeless silence. And they never had long to wait.

Only one person had ever succeeded in breaking down these strictly business arrangements. The Shtip doctor, the only physician in the town, genial, self-confident, wise in his own profession, always drank his morning coffee in the *konak*

courtroom. He had once dragged Midhat Bey from the verge of a nervous collapse, and after the *kaimakam* recovered, the doctor still came before beginning his morning visits, drank coffee and listened to the administering of justice.

He was there that morning, sipping noisily at his corner table, and nodding encouragement to a row of country and town offenders, ranged on a bench along the outer wall, when the young merchant entered. He watched the newcomer with interest and listened intently to his examination.

When the stranger was announced, Midhat Bey pushed his papers aside and looked up, scowling.

"Is this your passport?"

He shoved the paper forward.

The merchant glanced at it.

"It is," he said.

"And—you've come from Salonica?"

The *kaimakam* watched him closely as he answered.

"I started from there, came up to Serres, as you can see, then on in this direction."

"Where are you going?"

"To Uskub, on business for the Salonica firm which I represent. I have been detained now longer than I expected and shall be late for my appointment unless I make all speed from here."

"Not so fast, please," Midhat growled. "If

you were in such a hurry, why didn't you go by the railroad straight to Uskub?"

"There was business to be transacted in the towns along the road. I carry samples of our goods in my saddlebags and solicit custom on the way."

"Very well," Midhat muttered, "but now the trouble is just this: You say you came along the road from Serres. Then you must have passed through Demir-Hissar, Petrich, and Radovish, anyway. Yet this passport has not been countersigned since you left Serres."

"You are quite right, Midhat Bey," the merchant answered readily, "and I must tell you that in no other town have I found an administration of official matters so careful as yours. When I was at Demir-Hissar I stayed at the home of my uncle, but at Petrich the *kaimakam* was so drunk I could get no attention at all. My business is important and urgent. I waited another night and demanded my passport. An under-officer threw it at me and told me to clear out.

"At Radovish I hoped for better fortune and presented my passport at the *konak* in person, but the *kaimakam* was not at home. The next morning he was sleeping and refused to see any one before noon. I could not delay, and rode on. I have stopped nowhere since leaving Radovish."

The *kaimakam* swore under his breath.

"The old story. It is the same everywhere.

We are a slovenly race, and any old rascal could slip through our fingers."

He turned to the merchant.

"Your story is not impossible," he admitted. "But my duty is to see that every passport has been properly countersigned. You must wait in Shtip until I have made inquiries about you at Salonica."

"But, Effendi," the merchant objected, "I am no goatherd, who can spend three months in jail while his passport is being examined from here clear to Constantinople. My business allows of no delay. I represent Stuart, Prince & Co., a large American firm in Salonica, as you doubtless know, and it is absolutely necessary that I be in Uskub by to-night."

The doctor gulped his last swallow of coffee and sauntered up.

"There is something in what the gentleman says, Midhat Bey," he suggested. "It doesn't do to tamper too much with those big American firms. They can't understand our Ottoman ways, get red-peppery at the least annoyance, and send telegrams to their ambassador at Constantinople. They think they own the country, and sometimes they can make other people believe it too. I knew a *kaimakam* out Monastir way that got into a deuce of a mess because he meddled with the representative of an American company."

Midhat Bey's chin squared; he set his teeth hard.

"Well," he gave in grudgingly, "I won't keep you here. Cardash Effendi takes a gang of rascals up to Uskub to-morrow, and you may go with them. Akiff Pasha can get you out of your scrape if he wants to."

"But I must be off to-day, *Kaimakam!*" the merchant insisted.

"To-morrow!" Midhat Bey thundered. "*Zaptieh*, take him out."

The Salonican wheeled about and started for the door.

"And mind you don't try skipping off by yourself!" the *kaimakam* called after him. "Every door in Shtip has eyes and ears and—claws."

The merchant closed the door in haughty silence. He maintained the same dignity until he locked the door of his room and made sure he was alone. Then he emptied one of the saddlebags and looked carefully over a bundle of papers which he extracted from amidst his cloth samples. In the collection of six or seven passports which he carried, he was variously described as an American missionary-lady, a pedler of laces, a peasant from Nevrokopsko, a dealer in oils and paints, an exarchist teacher, and a Turkish military inspector traveling *incognito*.

The youth yawned and studied his reflection in the mirror. His hands fumbled for a while in the fluffy brown hair that came close to his ears. The wig loosened and fell to the floor. Two long, black, tightly plaited braids streamed

.

down—and Adalena smiled at herself in the mirror.

“An American missionary-lady on a visit to the Uskub district!” she mused, combing out her hair. “It will be strange to pass for a woman after having played the man so long.”

She concealed the American missionary-lady’s passport in a secret pocket of her coat. The other six went into the stove.

Readjusting the brown wig, she strolled to an eastern window, and stared long and wistfully at the Pirin Mountains that loomed elusive in the distance.

“I wonder—— Is he too as utterly alone as I?” she murmured.

CHAPTER XXIX

USKUB-BOUND

THE next morning a motley cavalcade rode out of Shtip, headed by Cardash Effendi, an Armenian converted to the Moham-medan faith for value received. Adalena, in her carefully appointed merchant's costume, rode at his side, morose and vexed. Directly behind, half a dozen peasants from the country around jolted along on bare muleback, bound to the saddles and guarded by a foul-mouthed, boisterous escort of Turkish and Albanian *zaptiehs*.

"You can see for yourself, Effendi," Adalena explained at the start, "that a heavy merchant like myself can not be corralled with that herd. I shall not need close watching. I have nothing to fear in Uskub."

A silver *medjidieh*, casually slipped into Cardash Effendi's expectant hand, completed the explanation. It really was not a bribe, in the bald vernacular of more sophisticated races. The coin served the combined purpose of an introduction and a reference. Had it been a copper *gologan*, Cardash Effendi would have known in a minute

that his prisoner was a stingy, every-day rascal, parading as an aristocrat, and would have treated him accordingly. Had the coin been a gold *lira*, the Armenian would have suspected immediately the sort of prisoner who offered to a mere head *zaptieh* what only *kaimakams* and pashas have a right to expect from those in their power, and the bribe, if bribe it was, would have defeated its purpose.

Adalena knew Turkish officialdom and its current rates. A silver *medjidieh* was the expected and rational *bakshish* (present) to introduce her to her imposed escort. Cardash Effendi, of course, did not acknowledge the gift; it would have been contrary to Turkish etiquette and in utterly bad taste. But he nodded affably, and the Salonica merchant rode at his side at the head of the procession, a fellow traveler instead of a prisoner.

She maintained a dignified silence, however, as behooved a heavy, moneyed merchant, and Cardash Effendi was made to feel honored in riding alongside the Salonican. The first half of the morning wore on in comparative silence.

At about ten o'clock they approached a wayside inn.

"Hey there, how much do you have in your pouch?" a *zaptieh* called.

"Not a piaster," another answered in true Albanian style. "But I have a dying thirst in my inwards which I'm going to revive. Ha! Ha!"

It was obviously one of his favorite jests. "The innkeeper is a Bulgar—why pay him?"

The heavy merchant turned to his companion.

"If the men are thirsty, Effendi, I'll see they have something to satisfy them."

The guard looked at him in surprise. Then he called out:

"Ho, stop, all of you! The noble merchant here says he will pay for the drinks."

The Albanians tumbled from their horses and fought for first entrance at the door, shouting out their orders. The peasants looked on thirstily.

The Salonican turned to his escort.

"You, too, must be dry, Effendi, and a long ride is ahead."

They went together into the inn. Cardash drank sparingly. The merchant ordered tea.

"Against the rules of my firm to have anything stronger when on a business journey," the merchant explained to Cardash. "But here, innkeeper, give these fellows something hot."

The Albanians shouted boisterous assent and gulped their portions of brandy.

"A drink all 'round to those poor fellows tied on the mules, too," the Salonican added.

Cardash looked at him wonderingly.

"The *Chorbadi* must have a bottomless bag," he said enviously.

"Not with me." The other smiled meaningly. "But we reach Uskub to-night."

They clambered on their horses and proceeded

at a brisk pace. The spirits of the entire party seemed to rise with the drinks. The merchant and Cardash Effendi waxed talkative.

"Do you have a large family?"

Cardash shook his head.

"Oh, not so large as it might be, but Allah has been merciful."

"How many children?"

"Five—and two daughters. You see," he explained, "we *zaptiehs* have to live on the blue sky if we attach more than one wife. I haven't had any pay for the last six months. If it were not for the peasants' crops and stock, this would be a hard winter for us. But—we get along!"

"Have you seen much service?"

"I fought in Asia Minor first. Then I was promoted and sent to Bulgaria when the Russians came down to fight the Sultan. I was in that infernal battle at the Shipka Pass, where a herd of Bulgar milkmen kept Suleyman Pasha's whole army at bay. They were above us in a narrow pass, and when their bullets gave out, they hurled rocks and logs and corpses at us, and held us, too, the cursed dogs, until the Russians arrived and rolled us back. Because of that defeat I was sent out here, and—here I stay, a *zaptieh*!"

The merchant nodded sympathetically, and neither spoke again until they stopped at a cross-roads tavern for dinner. Wine-jugs were ranged temptingly on the window-sill and a gander rampant added a touch of individuality to the aged

signboard, swaying and creaking in front of the gate.

Cardash rode to the door of the tavern and pounded lustily. The landlord stuck his tousled head out of the window.

"Feed them," ordered the officer, pointing to the *zaptiehs*, "and be quick about it."

The innkeeper asked no questions, but scuttled toward the kitchen, driving before him his only helper, a loose-jointed, shriveled lad of twelve. Adalena drew up her horse at the *zaptieh's* side.

"You will be my guest at dinner, Effendi? Certainly you do not expect to share with such a rabble."

"You are generous, *Chorbadji*," Cardash answered, and the merchant hurried away to give the order.

"Take a round of soup to the ones outside," he said, "and add plenty of bread. I am paying for this."

A significant touch on the merchant's pouch, and the landlord nodded assent.

An old rattle-jaw of a hostler, he moved about stealthily, timorously, as if afraid of some one at his back. His eyes roved here and there seeking a safe place to rest on. His toothless mouth worked in an incessant effort to express some idea which forever eluded him. Some tempest seemed to have swept over him, body and soul. Even his white hair waved timidly in the wind.

His whole being bespoke a deferential plea

that he be allowed to breathe a few moments longer. Only now and then an angry gleam shot out of the colorless, lashless eyes, which made one wonder what depths of vindictiveness welled up beneath the soft, yielding surface of the inn-keeper.

Adalena had seen him before. Ivko was the only man in the immediate vicinity who belonged to the revolutionary organization. That he did not recognize her was proof positive of the success of her disguise. She had meant to stop at his inn; but now she could ill afford to reveal herself.

"You are a Bulgar?" Ivko whispered with a look of sympathy.

Cardash Effendi drew near; the merchant turned away without answering and took a seat at a corner table. The Armenian sat opposite and gulped his dinner greedily. Adalena studied the soldiers.

"They have nothing to drink! Landlord," she cried in rebuke, "give them something warm and don't have it too thin."

She looked squarely into his eyes. The inn-keeper squinted understandingly. Her tone had been loud. The soldiers looked around.

"Come on with it, you lazy tortoise," an Albanian bawled, banging on the table with an iron spoon. "Bring a tankful."

"They ought not to have it," Cardash said in disapproval. "But this is their touch of your

European civilization. They will be like hogs by nightfall, especially that barrelly one with the twisted mustache. Faik is his name—an Arnaut wolf when he is sober, an Albanian pig when he loads up.

"You are not an Albanian? Of course not. I mean no harm anyway. Albanians are strong, healthy animals, faithful beasts if they like you. But Allah preserve you if they smell your blood! I have to humor my pack, and these are like shepherd dogs, all but Faik. He will die a wolf-pig."

"Oh, there is nothing in this place to hurt them," the merchant replied.

They ate in silence.

"Effendi," the merchant said as they pushed back their coffee cups, "the air will be getting chilly later in the afternoon, and I left my neckerchief in Shtip. I noticed a little shop across the road. Would you care to step over and see what I could buy there?"

They started for the door. Adalena lingered slightly behind. As she passed Faik, she slipped a coin on to the table beside him.

"Another glass, *zaptieh*," she muttered.

The Arnaut's hand clapped over the money.

"Another glass," he roared at the landlord. Cardash turned around. The merchant passed as if he had heard nothing.

The neckerchief was a quick bargain, but the young Bulgar lingered, looking at the rolls of bright woollens with the eyes of a connoisseur.

"I gathered from your talk, Effendi, that things might be pleasanter at home," the merchant said.

He picked up a piece of dress goods and examined it closely.

"It is because there is no money," Cardash answered. "The peasants have wheat, meat, but no money. Where is one to get it? Are you ready, *Chorbadji*?"

"Why don't you take your wife a present this time?"

The Salonican was dangling the bright plaid, holding it up to the light.

"Here is a beauty."

"I can not buy presents."

The merchant still held the fabric, examining the threads. At length he rolled it up and tossed it to the shopkeeper.

"Tie it up for the Effendi," he said. "There should be cheer in the home."

The Armenian's eyes glistened.

"You are more than generous, *Chorbadji*," he said. "She has had no such dress since the wedding."

The *Chorbadji* waved aside his thanks and went to look after his horse.

The road, west from the inn, avoided the village and followed the zigzaggy course of the Bistra River, a mad, tortuous current, spilling over the road-bed on its south bank and flooding the lowlands where it could not beat its way

against the rocky terraces which hemmed it on the north. It was a wild stream, bridgeless and quite unfordable, except after a protracted drought. A bridge across it would have saved the traveler to Uskub several hours. But time is cheap in Macedonia, and the Turks followed the turns and bends of the Bistra.

The cold snap had clutched the restless water on both banks. The dark current coursed angrily between the two eager sheets of ice that neared each other hour by hour. A squirrel could have leaped the gap that still intervened, but Cardash Effendi was no squirrel. He rode sullenly on, blowing lustily to keep his nose warm and cursing his *zaptiehs* and prisoners for being so slow.

It was twilight when the party rode into Uskub. A blistering cold wind blew down from the hills. The peasants chattered their teeth and groaned in chorus, their limbs aching with stiffness and cold, until Faik slashed out at them with his riding whip.

The gay windows of a tavern shone across the city square.

"Is the Pasha's palace here?" the merchant inquired.

"No," Cardash answered. "We have about ten minutes more to ride."

"We go directly there, then?"

"We do."

The Salonican looked himself over carefully.

"As I have told you before, Effendi," he said, "I represent one of the largest and most prominent firms in all Turkey, Stuart, Prince, and Company, wholesale importers and exporters, of Salonica. The day's ride has been long and I am disheveled and dirty. I should esteem it a great favor, and my firm would also appreciate it, if I had a chance to clean away some of the dust of travel before appearing at Akiff Pasha's palace."

Cardash shook his head.

"I am sorry," he said, "but it will be impossible, *Chorbadji*. I haven't a minute to lose unless I want these pigs on my hands all night."

He nodded toward the prisoners.

"I understand," the merchant replied. "Yet for the sake of my firm I must make a good impression on the Pasha. If I could stop for just fifteen minutes at the tavern there——"

He rode closely at the Armenian's side and tapped the back of his hand with something hard and round and shining.

"You could leave one of the others to guard me, say that hawk-eyed Faik. We would be at the palace almost as soon as yourself."

Cardash Effendi's hand turned and deposited the money in his pocket. It was a gold *lira* this time, but the favor asked was also considerable.

"All right," he said slowly, and called to Faik. "I don't envy you your watch-dog, though. He is the sharpest and meanest in the pack."

The Uskub tavern was more pretentious than

the one at Shtip. A stable-boy hustled out for the horses.

"Feed them in a hurry," the merchant ordered. "We must be off in fifteen minutes."

The boy stared curiously at the strange pair—the erect, carefully dressed merchant, the slouchy, goose-stepping Albanian. Paying no heed to him, however, they entered the tavern. Fumes of tobacco and wine and coffee welcomed them to the crowd of evening loafers. Faik sniffed thirstily.

"I'll get a room and clean up," the merchant said, slipping a generous coin into the *zaptieh's* hand. "Better get you a square meal and plenty to drink while you wait."

The Albanian looked at his charge gruffly. But he was famishing and thirsty, and a door, opened just then from the kitchen, let out thick clouds of steam heavy with the odor of beef and garlic. A *zaptieh* in uniform banged his glass on the table and shouted:

"By my boot-straps, there is Faik himself! Swinging pretty high, aren't you?"

"Go on, then," the Albanian muttered under his breath. "But see that you're back in fifteen minutes."

The ancient clock above the tavern counter had ticked out twelve uncertain minutes and Faik was draining glass after glass, when a slender figure in a long coat, head muffled in a neckerchief, slipped down the stairs, through the room, dim with the smoke of flickering, smelly oil lamps,

and disappeared in the dark, twisty, narrow alleys of Uskub.

An hour or so later, Cardash Effendi with several other officers rushed into the tavern and jerked the drunken, reeling *zaptieh* back to his senses. Faik rubbed his eyes and leered about stupidly. He had a dim recollection of guarding some one, he wasn't sure whom, and grabbed Cardash by the throat.

"Let go, you hound," the Effendi gurgled, throwing him off. "Where is that Salonica merchant?"

Faik toppled backward, struck a chair, and fell leaden to the floor. Cardash kicked him aside.

"Search the tavern," he shouted.

The room was in an uproar. Tables toppled over. The Bulgar merrymakers melted away in the night. No trace was found of the missing merchant.

A trembling hand touched Cardash Effendi's hand. The stable-boy whispered nervously—

"The *Chorbadji's* horse—it is here, and the saddle-bags."

Cardash followed him on a run to the stable. In the dingy, flickering light of a lantern, they spilled the contents of the bags over the floor. A pile of innocent-looking cloth samples was all they found.

"If he was a real merchant, why should he run away?" Cardash cursed.

"I think you have let a revolutionary slip

thorough your fingers," a Turk remarked. "He gave you a *lira*, you say?" this last in a confidential whisper. "He must have been an important rascal!"

"Well, I am sorry for him if he thinks he can hide in Uskub, the slippery eel! I'm going to the Pasha this minute, and if that make-believe merchant doesn't hang by his heels in jail tomorrow morning, Cardash is a ninnyhammer."

CHAPTER XXX

A CRUSADE OF TO-MORROW

DEMETER, by profession Master of the Bulgarian Secondary School, by vocation and in reality Chairman of the Uskub division of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, was disciplining an intractable trio of youngsters in his class-room, when a lad knocked at the door.

"A guest at your home, Master Demeter, who wishes to see you at once," the lad said quietly.

"I don't know who he is," Demeter's wife whispered as he came into the kitchen and inquired for his guest. "The door was open; he rushed in out of breath and told me to call you at once, but not to whisper a word to anyone else about his coming. He is very young and quiet. I put him in the loft, and he hasn't stirred since."

Demeter climbed to the loft, candle in hand. The garret stretched over the entire house, its cobwebby gloom relieved only by two dusty dormer windows and unfurnished, a low, dingy store-room and catch-all for every cast-off possession or precious heirloom of the family.

Demeter held his candle above his head and peered about uncertainly, his body but half projecting through the trap-door that opened in the floor. A mouse scuttled away before the light, but there was no other sound. Demeter could see only the dim shapes of old chests, a discarded bedstead, and some antique mattresses. He mounted a step higher on the ladder.

"My friend," he said aloud, "I am Demeter Nikoloff."

A shadow moved out of the darkness.

"And I, comrade," a girl's voice answered, "am Adalena Andreyeva. I have just escaped from the Turks as a merchant from Salonica. I shall need to change my disguise at once."

The trap-door slammed behind Demeter. The candle went out with the rush of air and fell from his hand. He grasped the girl's outstretched palm in both his own, shaking it in a mad welcome.

"You have escaped once more! Oh, what a woman! And we had given you up for lost. Our hope still lives, then. We have been burning candles for the dead. To-night we shall double the number, rejoicing over the living."

"Does news travel so swiftly in Macedonia?" Adalena said wonderingly. "How could you know I was captured?"

"We weren't sure, of course, but I knew how often you traveled as a monk, and we heard some days ago that the *Bash-Komitaji*, posing as a

monk, had been captured in the Pirin highlands near Goreno and was to be brought here to Akiff Pasha. We trembled, fearing it must be you, and despaired of our plans to save you, because we knew you would never let yourself really fall into the hands of the Turks alive."

Adalena stood paralyzed.

"What are you saying, Demeter? I was not captured as a monk near Goreno, but only escorted from Shtip in this merchant's costume. Tell me, what is wrong in Goreno?"

"Dobry the Iconograph blew up the house of Stavry the Money-lender, and killed Stavry and some *zaptiehs*, but lost his own life. But the *Bash-Komitaji*, if not you—— Then who can this monk be?" Demeter puzzled. "Why—Adalena!"

Demeter stopped in amazement. The girl's face was buried in her hands. She shook convulsively.

"Great God, have mercy!" she sobbed. "What have I done!"

He tried in vain to rouse her. She was deaf to his pleading. The whole miserable truth was slowly dawning upon her.

"Dobry gone! And Boyan—my brave hermit lad! You did it all for me; and—I scorned you for a coward."

In despair, Demeter staggered down to his wife.

"Put a dress on her," he said, "and burn

those things she has on. The Turks will be turning all Uskub upside down before long."

Some time later a pale, listless girl followed good mother Nedda down the ladder. She crept shivering to the open fire in the kitchen and watched apathetically as Demeter burned her merchant finery. The whole world seemed suddenly to have slipped from under her feet.

When her host spoke, she stared at him vacantly, struggling to catch his words, and sank back before he had finished, shaking her head in despair. Demeter lost his patience.

"Adalena," he said sternly, "are you a master-organizer or a missionary schoolgirl? You must rouse yourself at once. Get your passport; any moment may bring the *zaptiehs* here looking for their merchant, and what will become of Nedda and me then?"

His words had their effect. She straightened up. The dazed look left her eyes. Only her tense lips and bloodless face told that she was suffering.

"I took it out of my merchant's clothes when I changed into this dress, and put it into my bag," she said. "I've left that in the loft. Give me a candle. I shall bring it."

"I'll carry the light," Nedda said gently. "Your hand is too trembly, little one. And then you must have some supper. We are all hungry and may need our strength afore morning."

"Mother, we should keep Adalena here with

us," Demeter said kindly as they sat at supper. "Two old crows like us with their fledglings flown need a younger——"

Someone knocked violently at the gate; the three started to their feet.

"Your passport?" Demeter whispered hoarsely.

"On the shelf."

"You are——?"

"Miss Carroll, an American missionary on a visit to the Uskub district."

The knocking was insistent. Demeter growled, rose with a stifled curse and unbolted the gate. On the sleet-polished steps stood a gaunt, wizened mountaineer, clad in the corn-colored homespun of the Pirin villages and diffusing a perfume of frost-bitten garlic pickled in whiskey.

Demeter had expected a Turkish *zaptieh*, and was taken aback at the sight of the unlooked-for visitor. He did not invite the peasant in, but scrutinized him suspiciously.

"Well?" he asked.

Instead of answering, the gaunt one shook the snow off his blanket-weave coat and matted sheepskin cap and stepped past his unwilling host. Requiring no urging whatever, and with a suggestion of loutish unconcern, he walked over to the fireplace and made himself at home in the big oak chair.

"Well?" Demeter repeated.

But the peasant only sighed comfortably and

stretched his feet before the fire. The heat from the pine logs steamed up his sandals and leggings, and licked away the icicles of his shaggy beard and tom-cat mustache. For a while Demeter surveyed him with misgiving curiosity; then, deciding that his guest was thawed out and should be about ready to state the object of his visit, he offered him a pipeful. The gaunt visitor deftly snatched a brand from the fire and lighted up without singeing his eyebrows.

"The women-folk of this house are very hospitable," he drawled. "Do they entertain every guest that crosses the threshold?" He glanced significantly at Demeter's wife, who rose as if to leave the room, when his eye rested on Adalena. A perplexed look came over his face; he scratched his forehead.

"Have I—had the honor?" he began, but Demeter cut him short.

"No, you haven't. Miss Carroll is an American missionary lady who has just dropped in this afternoon to tell us about our little daughter studying in the Samokov mission-school." Demeter spoke glibly, but the odd peasant kept staring at the girl, who returned his gaze unperturbed.

"A missionary lady?" he murmured. "Quite so. I thought for a minute I had seen her, once, preaching a—a different gospel. In fact, I still think,—but no matter.

"Let them stay if they want to," he added.

"The missionary lady as well as your old woman."

"Whether she is old or young is her own business," Demeter's wife snapped,—the tender Nedda was very tender on some topics,—"but what may your business be?"

The peasant sniffed half-condescendingly, half-contemptuously.

"I came to ask questions, not to answer any," he grunted through his pipe, and stared unconcernedly at the fire.

"Several weeks ago," he began after a few moments, as if conversing with the pine-logs, "several weeks ago, Murad Pasha's tax-wagon was—well, let us say *robbed*, in the Krividol Gulch."

Adalena half-started, but Demeter answered in the most casual of tones:

"Really? News travels slowly these winter months in our parts."

"Where is it hidden?" the gaunt one suddenly shot the question at Demeter.

The school-master flared in protest. "What sort of a rascal are you to be asking me such questions?" he cried menacingly. "Do you want to get me into trouble,—or yourself?"

"Gently, gently, friend," the peasant went on. "I have come to find the exact whereabouts of that money—or get part of it."

"So you have," gibed Demeter. "And who may your honor be, pray tell?"

"Vasko *Voivoda*."

Demeter drew himself together and shuddered at the sound of that name, but to his wife it meant nothing; and it must have been no news to Adalena, for she returned calmly the look which the gaunt one cast at her.

"I thought I had seen you before," he concluded.

"You want your bone?" she surveyed him scornfully. "Well—there are no bones left."

"You mean the bones are all in Bulgaria by now?" he laughed. "Oh, no, the carcass was too big for that,—and besides I am myself on my way back from Bulgaria. Six days ago a man who knows told me the gold was still on the Sultan's side of the border. Never mind how he knew. Ivan the Huntsman's trip to the 'Turk's Head' cliff is not wholly his own secret. My men may find the gold before I find Ivan. You had better divide while you have a chance, Demeter."

The schoolmaster was taken aback, but quickly recovered his composure. "Every piaster of that money is needed to keep the spirit of revolution alive," he protested.

"The spirit of revolution! Bah!" Vasko sneered. "Whole regiments of the Supreme Revolutionary Committee's agents are scouring Bulgaria, wearing out their brains and shoe-leather collecting money, money, money. Dozens of imbecile squash-seed venders in Sofia are giv-

ing you a full half of their miserable earnings to buy gunpowder and Mannlichers, always in preparation for the big fight.

"And the big fight never comes. You people publish newspapers, you prepare memoranda, you hold mass-meetings in Bulgaria; in Macedonia you elect presidents and vice-presidents and regional inspectors; you do in fact everything,—but you do not fire a shot. Your rifles rust in your Sofia depots, and meanwhile, here in the mountains, we are facing the real music. You call me and my sort plain noon-day robbers, lacking ideals and all that, but it is we who give the Turks their due. How many Turks have you killed, School-master, or you, *Dulgokossa*?

"But I am always wasting my words—to the point. If you want half of that tax-money to get into Bulgaria, you'll hand over the other half to me and my band."

Demeter moved suspiciously toward the inner room.

"Oh, no, you needn't try!" Vasko warned him. "I have six chunks of lead in mine, and outside six unshaven devils like me know where I am this minute."

A violent kicking at the gate brought all to their feet.

"Ei, *Giaur!*" a raucous voice shouted commandingly.

"*Zaptiehs!*" Vasko hissed. "Where is your back door?"

"Here—quick," Nedda led him out.

"Open, *Giaur*," the voice clamored angrily. Demeter unbolted the gate. Half a dozen rough *zaptiehs* pushed in.

"Search the place," the leader called. "Here, who's this?" He turned to Adalena.

"An American missionary lady, Effendi," Demeter answered. "She has just arrived this evening by train. May I ask the reason for this intrusion?"

"If we find what we want, you'll know soon enough," the Turk snarled. "If we don't, you don't need to know. Where is her passport?"

Demeter handed it over. The Turk frowned at it, held it upside down, studied the foreign-looking, near-American seal, and grumbled assent.

"Better take it to the *konak* and be quick about it," he growled.

"I shall—immediately," Demeter answered.

They could hear the soldiers tossing the furniture about in the other rooms.

"Bring a light here, old woman," one of them called from the top of the loft steps. Nedda started to obey, but Demeter snatched the candle from her.

"Sit down," he muttered fiercely, and followed the soldiers.

Boxes were hurled about, chests thrown over; the house trembled with the clatter and resounded with the disappointed oaths of the soldiers.

"Nothing here, Effendi," they said, coming

down. "The fox has found another hole."

Two of them lingered long enough to gulp the milk from the table and snatch the silver candlestick that stood before an icon in a corner; then, with a leer at the girl by the wall, they followed the others. Demeter bolted the gate once more and stood with clenched fists, listening to the uproar in his neighbor's house. Nedda cowered in a corner, choking back her tears, her eyes riveted on her husband. Adalena gripped the back of her chair, rigid. As the noise of the soldiers died away, Demeter sank in his chair and leaned his head on his hand. The apathy of utter despair was in his face and voice.

"And this story is five hundred years old," he groaned. "It will be five hundred years older if we last that long!"

"No, Demeter, no," the girl cried. "It can not last so long!"

"Who will prevent it? We have tried; we have fought. And it is not Turks alone who oppose us. Take that slippery, peppery vulture Vasko. Do you think he wants liberty? He wants carcasses to feed on. Cutting a rich Turk's throat for ten pounds is his notion of a revolution,—that it may cost the lives of a hundred peasant devils after he is off, concerns him little. He precipitates a massacre and calls it keeping things stirred up. How can you liberate a land when the cowards turn Greeks and betray you to the Turks, and the cutthroats cause an uprising

before you are half-ready? Every year some coward or some hothead ruins overnight the labor of years in some district or other. Why, a man distrusts his own brother. What's the use?"

It reminded the girl of what another had said. She quivered and was long silent. Then she raised her head, her eyes glowing in the firelight.

"We must be more careful in choosing our men," she urged. "We must work harder."

"No, we are doomed to defeat as long as we fight alone, Adalena. Help must come from——"

"Help?" Adalena interrupted him. "Manna from the blue sky perhaps. Forget those nunnery tales, Demeter."

"So they are," Nedda agreed. "What good did even our holy icon do us? We've lost our candlestick in the bargain."

"Russia and Austria have worked out a plan of reform, I hear," Demeter suggested.

"So an Austrian told me last summer in Salonica. He was declaiming what a glorious port it could become—in Franz Josef's hands. Then what do you suppose he added?"

Adalena laughed bitterly as she asked the question.

"'Turkey is a sick man,' the Austrian said. 'Austria will not let him die until she is ready to bury him in her own backyard.'"

"And Russia? Demeter, to the Great White

Czar we are a bridge to Constantinople. If Bulgaria agrees to play bridge-keeper for Russia, our Bulgarian nationality is recognized at Petersburg. If not, why, we are treated as Serbs, Vlaks,—any old breed——”

“America——” Demeter began; but the Uskub school-master’s theme was an old one for Adalena.

“America!” she cried. “She sends us missionaries to save our souls from Satan. Why doesn’t she first save our sisters from the Turks? A religion which leads outraged women to praise Jesus instead of cursing Mohammed, which bends in prayer the knees and necks of live, strong men, is a very pestilence for Macedonia!”

“But America is rich and strong, she could help us!”

“What are we to America? Is she our mother or our mother-in-law? The worse off we are, the more comfort she will find in praying for us, five thousand miles away. A hundred Macedonian girls are ruined every week. Are they less virtuous, are they less beautiful, are they less precious than the missionaries’ daughters? Yet the Americans only keep on praying for the Holy Spirit to descend on Turk and Bulgar alike.

“But one gray-haired spinster is kidnapped to raise money for the revolution. The kidnappers demand less money than America sends every year to maintain prayer-meetings in this accursed land; the lady is cared for like a queen in cap-

tivity. But her American pedigree rouses her reverend kinsfolk to write fiery letters on darkest Macedonia; the kidnapped spinster becomes an international celebrity; she keeps ambassadors awake nights; a thousand journals begin to smell gunpowder, and armored cruisers cross the ocean and threaten to blow up the Sublime Porte unless the American-born goddess-lady is released immediately, so she can tell the pious folk of two continents how barbarous a nation she has been trying to save for the Lord. And meanwhile the daughters of Macedonia suffer the same unutterable agonies, but they are mere natives; their immortal souls are precious, but not their womanhood, their honor. We need rifles, Demeter, not Bibles. Preach the gospel of Jesus in this Turkish hell! It is a mockery!"

Demeter looked at her astonished. He had never heard her so roused.

"In Bulgaria our kinsmen are free," he protested. "I remember seeing valiant soldiery in Sofia."

Memories of her struggle with Boyan flooded Adalena's mind.

"Everywhere I hear the same song. As if Bulgaria could hand us our freedom all ready on a platter. If we can not help ourselves, Bulgaria can never help us!"

"Help ourselves?" Demeter laughed. "Adalena, as I looked, helpless, at those beasts ravaging my home, it seemed to me that all struggle

was vain, futile—unless some one comes to free us from this hell.”

“You cannot free an unawakened people, Demeter. Some of us would betray our liberators if they came along to-morrow.”

Adalena bent forward across the table, her eyes burning earnestly before the apathetic face of the Uskub man. In the voice of Demeter she heard the voice of a whole nation, hopeful and hopeless by turns.

“We must be ready ourselves. Bulgaria alone can do little; Servia nothing at all. But together, Demeter—think! Allied together, fighting shoulder to shoulder. What if, when we revolt, all Balkandom should join us, strike one united blow!”

“Greece, Montenegro?”

“Why not? Have we not suffered long enough through our mutual jealousies? Turkey is rotten. United, Balkandom could crush her to dust, and Macedonia, Old Servia, Thessaly, Crete, all could be free at once! But the flame of freedom must consume the souls of us all before it can set the Balkan armies afire. We, we, we must do it first!”

For a moment the man caught her vision. His face kindled.

“Then! Then!” he exclaimed jubilantly, his eyes afire. But the light died out.

“Adalena, dear girl, the day for miracles is past. Greek, Serb, and Bulgar were at each

other's throats long before the Turk appeared. Such an alliance—you are dreaming."

"What if a strong man were to be found to preach such a crusade, Demeter?"

Her voice trembled slightly.

"It is not my idea. A brave man, one who could have preached such a crusade, told it to me—Boyan, the hermit monk of the Pirin Mountains, who is coming to Uskub in chains at the order of Akiff Pasha."

"You know him then?"

"I left him just before his capture. They came for me. He must have given himself in my stead," Adalena said quietly.

Husband and wife exchanged comprehending glances, but said not a word.

It must have been near midnight. Demeter and Nedda slept soundly, but into their slumbers a persistent tapping finally penetrated.

"Nedda! Demeter! some one is knocking at the gate."

"Yes, Adalena, just one minute." The old people strained their ears, listening.

Tap-tap-tap—*tap*, it came insistently, three short knocks and one long one. Then again tap-tap-tap—*tap*.

"It is a comrade's signal, Nedda. Where's my coat?"

Demeter hustled into his clothes and opened the gate. Ivan the Huntsman rushed in, shivering with cold.

"Is Adalena here?" he asked hurriedly, as Demeter shot the bolt into its socket.

"Yes. What news?"

"Let me see Adalena."

They found her in the kitchen, fully dressed as they had left her before retiring. She sprang forward eagerly as she caught sight of Tosho's son.

"You bring tidings from Gorenó?"

"Boyan the Hermit was captured, the Turks mistaking him for you. He played the part of the *Bash-komitaji* valiantly, and almost escaped, but was recaptured at our hut and is now to be sent hither under strong guard, led by Selim Bey."

Adalena dug her nails into her palms.

"If he is brought here, nothing can save him from Akiff Pasha's clutches."

"We could organize a band of Uskub boys," Demeter began.

"No, violence won't do. The Turks will kill him before giving him up."

She thought a while.

"Listen," she burst out, "do you know Ivko's Inn near Poosty, on the road from Shtip here?"

"That old toothless fellow?" Demeter asked.

"Yes. He has lost his wife and three children in Turkish raids. He is the only man I can trust on the high road from Gorenó to Uskub. Selim Bey will be sure to stop overnight at his inn, so as to make a triumphal entry into Uskub in broad daylight. We must go to Ivko's Inn, Ivan, just

the two of us and bide their coming. I—I have a plan. Demeter, the meeting of the district leaders will have to be postponed. Get us a couple of horses ready. We must be off before dawn.”

CHAPTER XXXI

TOOTH-MONEY

BOYAN lay on the clammy prison-floor of packed mud and wondered what the morrow would bring. The sense of his utter helplessness maddened him, but, instead of crushing his spirit, only steeled his determination to play his part to the end. There was something tragically ludicrous, and something epic, about this hermit, on trial as a master-rebel, blushing at his success in an assumed rôle which he had refused to accept in real life.

"*Bash-komitaji!*" he smiled bitterly. "How she would laugh in scorn, did she see me masquerading! And yet—if I only had that call again! Adalena," he whispered, "if we could only meet: together we could set this whole nation aflame."

The jangle of keys at his door brought him to himself.

"Here, you sharp-tongued unbeliever," the jailer yelled at him, "up with you! In half an hour you go under special guard to Uskub. Akiff Pasha will tickle your tongue into confessing, and Akiff uses red pepper, I have heard.

"So listen to Old Mehmet Aga," the jailer went on wisely. "Oil your jaws a bit when you speak to him. Akiff Pasha is no Albanian. The high language doesn't go with him. He'd make kindlings of the Grand Vizier himself if the Vizier didn't weigh his words."

"Shut up," Boyan commanded. "Bring me something to eat."

"Feed a prisoner that is off my hands?"

The jailer swore.

"Where do you think you are, you cassocked gander? In a monastery chicken-coop? There—can't you see what a plenty of them are crawling all about you?"

He sniffed in the direction of the inhabited walls.

"Eat your fill!"

He banged the door viciously as he left the *bash-komitaji* to his bed of clammy dirt.

In Ivko's wayside inn Selim Bey held high court and carnival on a night biting, clear, and cold as only a Macedonian night can be cold when the winds of the Pirin peaks and the winds of Shar whistle in concert. The windows rattled behind their iron-bar lattices. The chimney-top moaned. The logs on the fire spasmodically flamed up or filled the room with smoke.

It was a night for ghost stories, for hot, steaming *raki* and ruddy wine, for indoor riot and ribald jollities. For Selim Bey, it was the last night

of his lordship over the *bash-komitaji*, whose proud disdain had humiliated and increasingly angered him. But Selim was in the good graces of Akiff Pasha. He had even contemplated turning his back on rustic Goreno and trying his official luck in Uskub.

The safe delivery of the Master Rebel would improve his standing with the *Vali* of Uskub. Meanwhile the night was biting. So was Ivko's *raki*; and the prisoner was accordingly dumped without much ado in a corner away from the fire and left there to ponder on his brief destiny in undisturbed solitude.

At a table drawn near the burning pine-logs, glasses clinked, platters clattered, the old rickety tavern rang with Turkish revelry. Fermented grape-juice or the sweetest wine have not been distilled: they are, therefore, unclean and taboo to strict, old-fashioned Moslems. But *raki* has been through the fire,—and the dizziest glass of fiery whiskey goes in modernized Islam. The *zaptiehs* diluted theirs with water: Selim sipped it almost straight.

Only two sullen *zaptiehs* failed to share in the common jollification. Stationed on guard near Boyan, they kept a grumbling vigil, covetously counting the glasses of *raki* whisky that were the portion of their more fortunate comrades. They alone abstained. They alone, and one other. By the foot of the shaky staircase, Tossun Effendi, sent along by Murad Pasha as his son's especial

aide, watched the riotous crowd in taciturn disapproval. Unable to restrain himself any longer, he approached the Bey.

"I don't like it, Selim Bey," he remonstrated. "The *zaptiehs* are making hogs of themselves. Another hour, and their rifles will not be worth a shepherd's crook."

But Murad's son was in a jolly, democratic mood.

"You're a croaker, Tossun," he laughed at his aide, "the boys have been freezing on horse-back all day, and we must be up and away bright and early to-morrow. Let them fill up for once in their lives: nobody is paying for this!"

"*Psst*, you toothless caterpillar," he shouted to the hostler, "bring in another platterful of mutton, and have a bunch of garlic all cleaned to go with it, and here we're all out of your baked dough: haul in some real bread next time. The boys have cleaned up the eggs, too. Now hurry about it, lazy hands!" Selim was warming up. "And hold on here, before you go after your litter, you'd better pay up!"

The innkeeper raised his hand to his heart in a pleading gesture:

"Pay up for what?"

"For what? For making me soil my mouth eating your garbage and drinking your swill, cripple-foot. Do you think I am going to work my teeth over a *giaur's* cooking for nothing, eh? Tooth-money you must pay us all: *dish-parasi!*"

"Don't torture a carcass like me, pray don't, Selim Pasha!"

"Selim Pasha indeed!" the Bey roared. "Well, then, see what Selim Pasha will do to you! Essad Effendi," he called to a burly *zaptieh*, "hang him by one foot and shake out all his pockets!"

Ten minutes later Ivko shambled off to the kitchen, his hands trembling, his head in a whirl, with a look of raging agony in the bloodshot eyes, while the *zaptiehs* were quarreling over the handful of copper and silver coin which had dropped out of his pockets. The Turks took up their drinking again.

Once more Tossun drew forward.

"I wish we had pushed on to Uskub to-night, Selim Bey," he insisted. "We could have made the city by midnight."

"Yes, and crept in like frozen curs to give our juicy bone over to Akiff Pasha! Listen to him, boys," he turned to the *zaptiehs*, "why did we wear parade-uniforms, and why did we oil our mustaches, if we meant to slip into Uskub by the back door?"

"Uuuh!" the *zaptiehs* jeered in sympathy with their chief.

"No, Tossun, we'll march in Uskub with drum and bag-pipe precisely at noon to-morrow, and make every plump *Hanoum*, and *giaur* female too, air her house while looking at us out of her window."

The table applauded with clinking glasses and loud nose-blowing.

A knock at the inn-door sent the old hostler shambling across the room on his way to let the newcomers in.

"Stop there, froghead," Selim shouted. "Find out who they are first."

Ivko pushed aside the curtain of a small window near the door and peered out.

"Open, *giaur!*" voices shouted in Turkish. Ivko swore under his breath, but smiled approvingly at Selim Bey.

"Sultan's soldiery, I fancy," he said and unbolted the door.

"Well, by my empty saddle-bags! Osman Effendi!" Selim jumped up to greet the leader of the party. "What are you seeking here on this blistering icicle of a night?"

"Making my obeisance to Murad Pasha's darling firstborn," the newcomer laughed.

Osman Effendi was Akiff Pasha's right hand, and he looked the part. His oiled, close-cropped black hair, shaved around the neck, his pomade-stiffened, awl-pointed moustachios and bristling side-whiskers, his double-vested, velvet-trimmed spintop-pantalooned trappings, all showing beneath his unbuttoned wolfskin coat, with a long-tasselled fez surmounting all, proclaimed him the knowing dandy that he was, a *bon vivant* whose inexhaustible stock of Constantinople tales kept the Pasha of Uskub in good humor and himself

in an abundance of good cigars and better hopes of official preferment.

"Guess it is too cold for the old masters, so they send us out a-roving," he laughed at Selim Bey. "An important rascal slipped through Cardash the Armenian fool's hands just as he entered Uskub, and I've been freezing my ankles trying to trace his hoof-prints. And you?"

"As you see——" Selim glanced in Boyan's direction.

"Oh, is this the *bash-komitaji*? Good evening, prince of idle dreamers! we'll meet again: don't fail to recognize me." He coughed in disdain and spat derisively in the hermit's face.

"But what are you doing here, Selim Bey?" he continued in a sophisticated, almost condescending tone: "eating and drinking with your inferiors?"

Selim mumbled a reply.

"This hole is no place to sleep in. Come over with me: there is an extra soft bed somewhere in Poosty, let's find it. I'll leave Djavid Effendi, my best man, in your stead, and he is quite sober, Selim Bey. Hey, you cross-eyed scarecrow!" he yelled at the innkeeper, "get the Bey's horse ready in two winks!"

"But, Selim Bey," Tossun protested, "the *bash*——"

"Hang the *bash-komitaji*!" Selim shouted at him. "Djavid Effendi here will remain in my place. And I'm going just over to Poosty."

Selim raised a glass. "Come, sweeten your temper a bit, Tossun."

The head-*zaptieh* shook his head.

"Coffee, then," the Bey ordered. "Here, you sniveling, knock-kneed, donkey-eared lunatic!" he yelled at the bewildered boy, "bring the Effendi a cup of hot coffee, and don't you bring him hot swillwater like this you brought me, or I'll tan your hams!"

"Before you turn in, Djavid Effendi," Selim rose, "order the soberest one to watch the road." Djavid nodded and settled down in the Bey's place at the table.

"Allah bless you with many concubines, Selim Bey!" a bleary Kurd yelled in a high-pitched voice as Murad's son followed the party of Uskub-men out of the inn. "Why did we leave Goreno, anyway, if we can't have a little fun out of this cold trip? Think of all the winter-*sedenki* we are missing: sugar-fried wheatshreds, and red-lipped plump partridges . . ."

The Kurd had struck a common note; the table buzzed with tales and reminiscences, recounted obviously for the newcomer's benefit. The conversation wandered into its accustomed Turkish channels: the brave men of the Sultan vied with each other in the shameless explicitness of their narratives; blatantly frank and circumstantial, the tales dripped from clammy lips that curled with bestial memories. The unutterable story of Macedonia's manhood and womanhood had un-

dergone a diabolical translation, and the rehearsal of heart-rending cries now shook the round-table of Mohammedans with laughter.

Tossun took his coffee in slow, noisy sips, wiped his mustache on his sleeve, and went over to the corner where the prisoner sat. He looked long at the Bulgar and his two burly guards, then tapped Ahmed significantly on the shoulder.

"I am going to sleep now," he said. "At the least alarm fire a shot, and I'll be with you."

The *zaptieh* saluted. Tossun climbed the rickety stairs to the sleeping quarters above, selected a bed in the room nearest the landing, and rolled in.

Below the revelry continued. But the Turks had been ahorse all day, and toward midnight even the sober Djavid Effendi grew drowsy. One after another the men straggled upstairs and threw themselves across the mattresses, the latest comers rolling on the floor.

Muddled with drink, Djavid still had a hazy notion that he was to order some one to do something, but he could not remember exactly what. He scratched his forehead as he stretched his heavy legs on the single bed in the room reserved for himself, but he could only decide that some one was to guard somewhere. He banged on the wall. A sleepy *zaptieh* from the next room opened the door.

"Sit on the floor and watch my bed," Djavid grunted and rolled over. The next minute both of them snored in concert.

CHAPTER XXXII

A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH

DOWNSTAIRS all was quiet. In the muddy translucence of the little kerosene lamp the *zaptiehs* watched drowsily. Ivko stretched his weary frame on a bench near the fire, apparently asleep. The pine-logs had burned to coals. The wind whistled mockingly through the chimney, and little gusts of cold air coursed through the loose windows. Outdoors, a clear silver-gray chill wrapped the bare ground.

Boyan leaned back against the wall. His eyes closed wearily, only to open at the least stir indoors or out. Escape seemed beyond his hope now, if all he had heard of Akiff Pasha's cruelty was true. Yet he hoped against hope. Surely he could not be denied his chance to die fighting. This drunken rabble, only three of the brutes sober—— Surely there could be a way. And yet precious hours seemed to wear on, and no one came, saint or sinner. To-morrow he would be in Akiff Pasha's bottomless jail-pits. He had played a haughty game with time all the way from his craggy cell to Ivko's inn; but the end seemed near.

The shriveled, snively lad had disappeared.

Upstairs a window-shutter began flapping. Ivko stirred uneasily, got up and shuffled toward the stairs. A growl from Ahmed stopped him.

"The noise may disturb the *zaptiehs*, Effendi," the old man remonstrated, pointing upstairs.

The *zaptieh* grunted in assent. The innkeeper stole softly up the stairs. He crept on tiptoe from room to room, ostensibly hunting the loose shutter. But as each door closed behind him, the key turned in the lock, imprisoning the sleepers within.

"And the windows are all iron-barred," Ivko grinned in toothless vindictiveness.

He came down to his bench and stretched himself on his back. Presently he sat up, sniffing; there was a smoky smell of petroleum in the room; the lamp sputtered and burned at the wick.

"Needs refilling, Effendi," he explained to Ahmed. "That lubber-lad always leaves half his chores undone."

He carried the lamp to the wood-shed. When he closed the doors only the glowing ashes threw dim, reddish lights over the three faces. The place was appallingly quiet. It made Medhad nervous. He turned his eyes questioningly to the other *zaptieh*; but Ahmed only stared ahead, his hands resting on his rifle.

"I wish some of the others——" he began, looking about the room uneasily. "Oh!"

Ahmed glanced up and found himself staring into the black nose of a revolver. Medhad sat up, fascinated, stunned by the shining barrel which seemed to tickle his throat. Leaning forward in his astonishment, Boyan strained his eyes to catch sight of the two black figures behind the triggers. They stood perfectly immobile.

"One move, a sound, and you are dead *zap-tiehs*," Boyan heard, in a voice that made his whole being riot within him. "Your rascally friends upstairs are powerless to help you. Every door is locked and the windows iron-latticed. Ivko, take their rifles; then tie and gag them."

The Turks stood helpless while the host dumped an armful of shavings and straw in the middle of the floor and approached them. The old heart beat rapidly with a new, overmastering passion.

It was not mere revenge which thrilled the worn-out innkeeper; though—who knows?—perhaps in his mind there flashed the picture of his wife's black hair waving piteously from a Turk's saddle, while he himself looked on in helpless agony, bound to the hitching-post; and perchance he could still hear the heart-rending cries of his three little girls, strapped across another saddle. Memories which had haunted him all his life doubtless came back with fresh vividness as he bent to pick up the Moslems' rifles.

And yet more than personal vindictiveness glowed in the bloodshot eyes. The weather-

beaten, nondescript peasant was for once in his life the messenger of a Balkan Nemesis. A deeper, vaster hatred consumed him. It was not even hatred, but a passion much more elemental—the avenging fury of an agonized people. The toothless mouth almost grinned in its calm intensity, for at last the stammering tongue had caught the long-lost idea which had all his life eluded him.

“To-night God is greater than Allah, *zaptieh*,” he hissed. “You have had your turn all my life. This time Ivko is in the saddle.”

Ahmed ground his teeth, but could not shift his eyes from the pitiless revolver.

“Here, Slavy!” Ivko turned to the boy. “Bring the rags and ropes.”

Quietly and quickly the two worked. Not until the Turks lay on their backs, bound hand and foot and gagged, did the dark figures move their revolvers. Then with the low cry, “Boyan, you are free!” Adalena was at his feet, frantically cutting at the ropes about his feet and hands.

He staggered up, clasping her madly.

“It is you—you! You have saved me!”

“But not alone,” she protested. “Ivan the Huntsman is here. Without him I should have been helpless.”

The two men shook hands in silence.

“We shall meet again,” Ivan said significantly.

“But now we must all be off at once.”

“Just one moment, Ivan,” old Ivko put in. “I

went after some lamp-oil for this son of Allah. I must let him have it before I go."

He carried his can to the pile of shavings and poured the kerosene over the heap and around the floor at the foot of the stairs.

"Oh, don't—not alive!"

Adalena shuddered in protest. But Ivko had already struck the match.

"Out of here, all of us!" he ordered. "No one under God or Allah will learn of this night's escape. Let it seem that we have all gone down together. Go!"

The flames leaped riotously from stair to stair and licked their way along the floor of the room toward the *zaptiehs*. They stirred in terror. The whole place filled with smoke. The five Bulgars shrank through the kitchen and into the cold winter night.

"Here, Boyan, put on this coat, and here's your rifle," Ivan the Huntsman said. "I'll take the other, and the good innkeeper can carry my revolver."

"But what of him?" Boyan spoke unsteadily. "Where will he go?"

"I, Master Rebel?" the host asked. "What does it matter where I go or where Slavy goes? We are nothing, we are—just little warts. There are thousands of Ivkos and Slavies in Macedonia. But you two—you will be the saving of us, and of Slavy's children and grandchildren."

The old innkeeper turned to Boyan and, almost

shyly, stretched forth his hand. Boyan clasped it warmly.

"I don't suppose you will have time to remember me after we part, and it is no matter," the old man said in a low voice. "But look here, you snivel-nose," he called to the boy, "look here and don't forget to tell your sons and grandsons that Ivko the innkeeper, with whom you worked at the tavern near Poosty village; Ivko, with no teeth left in his mouth and no brains in his head, shook the Master Rebel's own hand with his dirty paw. The Virgin bless you, Master!" Then, as if ashamed of his outburst of loquacity, he drew back sheepishly.

"Now I guess we two will fade away somehow," he concluded.

"No, Ivko."

Ivan the Huntsman stepped in.

"The Seven Well-springs have a home for you and the boy. Come, let us be off. We shall cut cross-country straight for home, but more than three of us must not be together."

"Listen!"

The whole inn was ablaze. Tongues of flame shot from the windows. Yells and hurrying feet sounded from the upper floor. Rifle-butts banged on the locked doors and barred windows. Shots added to the chaos of curses and fire. The *zaptiehs'* horses in the stable neighed and stamped in their terror.

"Burn, old match-box! Burn, curse you! Not

a soul of them shall ever come out alive!" Ivko yelled.

"Here!" Ivan shouted. "I've saddled the horses. Off with us all!"

Three figures a horse vanished toward the Gorenno uplands.

"And we, Adalena—whither?" Boyan hesitated a moment, curbing a *zaptieh's* horse, which pranced with fear.

"To the mountains," Adalena cried, and spurred Tossun's Arab charger. "There is a chance of making the Vissoky Bridge 'way up in the country before daylight. If we cross it we're safe."

But the sound of answering volleys from the village brought them to a sudden stop.

"The garrison at Poosty is roused," Boyan exclaimed.

"Then to the river directly," Adalena gasped. "It must surely be frozen solid by now; it was ice all over when we came here this morning."

The horses dashed toward the Bistra; they reached it and raced down the road. The shots from Poosty grew more frequent every minute. But not a sound came from the burning tavern. The fire had lighted the whole country round, however.

They rode at top speed to reach the next turn in the road. Once out of sight from the village, they slowed down and looked for a likely place to cross.

"We must get across," Adalena insisted. "Budno Selo is an hour's ride in front of us, and if the Turkish soldiers there get roused, we'll be between two fires."

The two dismounted and stepped gingerly on to the ice. Boyan went ahead on the frozen surface, stamping lightly to test its strength. It held. Their spirits rose. They came nearer and nearer the middle of the stream.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A BRIDGE ACROSS

LOOK out!"

Boyan caught the girl's arm and pushed her back. They held their breath, listening. Just in front of them they heard the swish of the current rubbing against the ice-fringe and grinding the chunks broken from the sides.

"It is not frozen over," Boyan whispered desperately. "We can not cross here."

"Can't we jump it?" Adalena strained her eyes to see the width of the opening.

"Even if we could, our weight would break the ice on the other side. Let's go farther down."

Half sliding, half running, they sped along the shore. Everywhere the same torrent ground its ice-victims and mocked at the fugitives.

"Isn't there a bridge or ford, or something?" Boyan groaned.

"The bridge is 'way behind us at Vissoky," Adalena answered, "and the Poosty garrison is in between. There is no ford or house or anything here, only a fisher-hut, abandoned in winter. I saw it this morning."

"An old hut?" Boyan cried. "Where?"

"We can't hide in it. They will be searching it before morning."

"Where is it?" he repeated.

She led the way along the first fringe of trees. The loose door, flapping, creaking in the wind, guided them to the place.

The hut was really a shed, with the boards nailed loosely on the outer wall and part of them hanging down. Boyan felt them carefully. Then he grunted in satisfaction. He gripped a long plank and started ripping it from the wall. The nails squeaked, squealed.

"Be quiet!" Adalena whispered. The least noise lacerated her tense nerves.

"*Rrrr!*" some one yarred from within. In an instant the two were inside. A frightened, disheveled head, still half-asleep, showed up from the large box, which had seemed empty when they first looked in. Obviously it did the service of a bed; some of the straw with which it was lined still hung about the sleeper's hair.

"Keep quiet!" Boyan began.

But the disturbed fisherman was in no mood for silence.

"What are you doing here, tearing my hut to pieces?" he shouted, starting to leap out of the box.

"Not a sound, or I'll—kill you!" Boyan hissed.

"Kill? Who are you, anyway? Ho! Hey!

robbers!" he yelled at the top of his voice, and jumped at Boyan.

Something snapped within the hermit. He felt something hard and heavy in his hand; he heard the fisherman groan and topple back into the box.

Adalena clutched his elbow.

"Come, don't look at him: you've done what you've done. Let us be off, Boyan!" He threw the fisherman's blanket over the body, and the two ran out of the hut.

He pulled hard at the squeaking plank; at last it flopped noisily to the ground, dragging him with it.

"Quick!" he said, scrambling up. "Help me carry this over."

Adalena caught the idea and sprang to his assistance. They carried their improvised bridge as near the edge of the ice as they dared, and laid it down with one edge projecting over the water.

"Push!" Boyan ordered breathlessly.

Slowly they shoved it forward, until they felt it touch the ice on the other side. Still another foot, and then Boyan crawled along to discover how far it reached over their own side. There was not an arm's length to spare. His fingers at the edge could feel the water below the board.

"Step lightly and keep your head cool," he said hoarsely. "I think it will hold."

She drew back, clutching his arm.

"Must I go first?" she pleaded. "Then what if it won't hold you?"

"You'll be safe anyway—Go!" he said harshly.

"Oh!" she drew away in terror. He caught her fiercely in his arms; kissed her once, and then again, hotly.

"Adalena, for God's sake, go!"

A whirl at their feet startled them.

"Boyan, it's gone!"

He stared, stupefied, unbelieving. They heard the board breaking the ice as it swept down the current.

"The ice-chunks must have piled up and swept it away," he groaned. "We shall have to get another."

They dashed up the bank in reckless haste. A rifle cracked somewhere; then a scattered volley.

"They are beginning a search," Boyan groaned.

It was hard to find another board that would come off, though they searched all four walls.

"Why not try the door?" the girl suggested.

"Too short and heavy," replied Boyan. "Ah, here at last!"

He gave a violent jerk and ripped a plank from the hut-wall, but it fell splintered in the middle. Boyan swore madly.

"No," she cried, "this is all right. Use the shorter piece for a lever and pry off the one below."

He snatched it up, working feverishly now. Slowly the plank loosened, it was longer and more securely nailed, but finally it yielded. Again they ran out upon the ice. The frail bridge was shoved forward; it touched; rested on the other side.

"Now," he begged.

She went forward without a word. Her foot on the edge, she turned just an instant and touched his hand with her finger-tips. Then slowly, slowly, she stepped over the current. The ice-fragments piled up; they touched her feet as she walked on, inch by inch, her hands outstretched to preserve her balance.

"Hold the board, I'm across," she called, her voice so weak she doubted if he could hear. She crouched, then stretched herself prone on the ice, clinging to the end of the plank.

"Lift it, Boyan. Lift it—let the ice away."

There was no answer, but she felt the board move. She lifted her end, and the ice-jam swept with the current. They adjusted the board again.

"Come," she called to him, and strained to see him start. She could not move, she still lay prone on the ice, face downward, clutching the board convulsively. She saw him coming nearer, nearer, halfway, two-thirds over. She was breathing again. Then directly before her she heard the ice giving way,—a steady, certain cracking. The board trembled, shook: the ice had opened on the other side.

"Boyan!" she shrieked in terror.

The plank whirled, was almost wrenched from her grasp; she jerked back, her fingers madly clutching her end of the perilous bridge. But with one last lunge, Boyan leaped and rolled over and over to safety.

She crept to him, and they climbed up the snowy bank. Trembling, panting, hand in hand, they stood there, listening. The burning inn was still very near; but between them and the Poosty garrison the current of the Bistra River sang a song of promise, of freedom.

The sun was high overhead, when Costi the fisherman groaned and stirred stiffly. Every limb in his body ached, a dull, stony-frozen ache. Something burned in his eyes; he opened them; but the blinding sunshine made him blink and turn aside. Slowly, as from afar, the idea came to him that he was still alive. A chaos of memories buzzed at the outskirts of his consciousness; the sunlight streaming through the ripped-up wall suggested a horrid dream which persistently eluded him. He moved as if to rise: the loose door of the hut squeaked noisily at the same instant as it caught the force of a sudden gust of wind.

In a twinkling Costi remembered it all.

"The rascals must have tried to brain me!" he cursed loudly, touching the bump in his head, the blood-clotted hair. "Why were they ripping off my planks?" Still dizzy, he moved slowly

about, went out, and looked up and down the river. The tracks of his unwelcome guests were still visible on the snow.

"I can't see what in the name of Saint George——" he speculated, but his mind moved slowly. By the middle of the morning it had reached one point. They must have been fugitives: he saw their tracks on both sides of the river. They—they had used his boards to get across!

The fisherman's mind moved slowly, but it was a sly, cunning mind. Some one was pursuing those two; some one would be glad to hear his story, and pay for it perhaps.

Costi set out for the *konak* of Poosty to find that some one.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE FIRE WITHIN

“**T**HERE, there is Ivan’s hut, to the left of you, against that rock, Boyan. Don’t you see it?” Adalena cried joyously, battling her way through the tossing hemlock branches.

“That there?” Boyan studied the tiny hut dubiously as it quivered with the furious cadences of the wind. Pinned as it was against the solid rock, it still shook uncertainly every time the blast caught it on the corner. Around it the huge pines swayed and bent in low, moaning protest at the onrush of the wind, and the spruce-trees waved a thousand arms in a thousand frenzied dances to the shrill piping of the gale.

Boyan and Adalena stepped cautiously up to the shed and pushed open the heavy-timbered door. It swung back noisily, and the eager wind, rushing past and around them, whirled and shook and whistled until everything in the little room moaned and creaked forbiddingly. Adalena drew back.

“Pooh!” she laughed at herself. “Of course it is empty. Close the door, quick.”

But a second wild gust whizzed past and blew the water-crock down at her feet. Boyan threw his weight against the door, pushed it shut, and dropped the latch. The bolt was missing from its socket.

"No matter," he said. "Turks will not venture up here to-night."

Adalena picked up the pieces of the crock.

"A bad omen, this," she laughed. "A crockful of ill-fortune will run my way. Do you believe in omens?"

"I did the night at Ivko's inn," he replied, "when the loose window-shutter began flapping. I knew then I'd have visitors. And what visitors, Adalena mine!"

He struck a light and surveyed the interior. "Ivan's lair is as bare as mine," he laughed, "and less holy." He pointed to a pack of cards which the wind had scattered over the floor.

The windblast shook the huntsman's cabin as he spoke, rattling the one small window and whipping cold swishes of air under the door.

"The cave would be a safer place on a night like this," Boyan remarked, "but Murad's bloodhounds know the scent to the cave."

"This will be safe enough for us," Adalena spoke from the dark corner where the hut rested against the rock. "Safe enough, and more hospitable than we had expected, Boyan!" she exclaimed jollily.

"Never mind that log,—here is a pile of dry

charcoal. And in this stone pocket a feast is waiting for you and me, bless the Huntsman's heart!"

Coffee bubbled over the hot, sputtering charcoals, and Boyan, stretching himself on the black bearskin beside the three-legged brazier, watched the girl slice off wide slabs from the hard, black bread and long cuts of dried *pastarma*-meat. Dried apples, too, and apricots, a jar of honey,—she took them out one after another from the stone-shelf pantry, and last of all a goodly jug. But this she put back.

"We mustn't impose too much on Ivan's hospitality," she laughed.

A carefree spirit of joyous abandon seemed suddenly to possess her; it breathed in every gesture; she danced and twittered about, glad to be alive.

"For once she has forgotten Macedonia," Boyan thrilled as he watched her move about. How quick and strong she was now,—almost a different person from the pale, helpless girl he had tended in his cave. Manly-vigorous, buoyant with unspent strength, he had wondered at her endurance while they plowed their way through snow-drifts and thickets.

Since they crossed the Bistra River, her every word had been about the Cause, and he had not dared speak of love. In the white solitudes of the mountain-land, she had tramped beside him, and the countless multitudes of Macedonia had

paced between the two; and all their talk had been of bullets and rifles and gold coins, districts and district leaders. She spoke of gunpowder, of dynamite,—and the snow that shook from the hemlock branches blushed as it caressed her cheek, and her eyes burned the sunglow to ashes.

Lucid, vibrant as a clear bell, with the one idea that permeated her whole being, hard and unfaltering—yet soft, gentle too, womanly tender and delicate, choosing time and place to beg for assistance, luringly independent, and warm, warm beneath the cold warrior-armor of her! God, what a woman to live for, to fight with, to love!

“Oh, who will bear it, Velko,
Your long, slender flintlock,
Chieftian bold,
Lord of the Highlands, valiant Velko, warrior bold!
Oh, who will ride it, Velko,
Your wind-racing stallion . . .”

she sang in the back of the hut, but the song was cut short by the sizzle of the charcoals as the coffee boiled over. Boyan sprang to snatch it from the fire.

“Supper is ready,” she said; then with a chuckle in her voice: “What was your Holiness dreaming about?”

She brought the bread and *pastarma-meat* in a wooden bowl over by the brazier and poured out the coffee.

“Dreaming?” he spoke feelingly. “I was dreaming of my dreams, Ada.”

She tried to laugh away his gravity.

"Dreaming of your dreams!" she exclaimed. "That shows they will come true—a very good omen, if the dream itself be a good one."

"This one was—but I don't know what to make of it."

"I wish I could interpret it for you," she said; then, laughing, busied herself with the improvised meal.

"But I never dream, I know nothing about dreams. Here, try this *pastarma*, Comrade, it is really better fare than one has a right to expect finding in this God-forsaken Pirin wilderness."

The steaming coffee warmed and freshened the taste of the really delicious dried goat-flesh and venison. They dipped the hard black bread in their cups to soften it; but the fruit was old and tough as leather.

"Ivan must keep these apricots for ruminating purposes," Adalena joked. "I know,—fill this kettle full of snow. With the honey in place of sugar, I'll be serving you in half an hour the finest apricot-preserves you ever tasted."

They were tough preserves, but her enthusiasm over the Huntsman's fare was contagious. Boyan ate hungrily but silently, though she seemed anxious to maintain a spirit of jolly comradeship between them, a man-to-man attitude. She laughed, her eyes danced; she refused to be serious.

"Don't you wish Selim Bey were here, *Bash-komitaji*?" she jested. "How we could hang him, boots-up on that rafter, and shake out all his dirty *medjidiehs* for tooth-money. I'd make him exercise his jaws on Ivan's apricots, eh, Boyan?"

His laugh was stunted and uncertain.

"What is the matter with you, Mister Hermit?" she scolded him. "To look at your forehead, one would think you were still in Ivko's tavern, instead of here, seven snow-clad peaks and seven snow-buried valleys away from friend or foe.

"Come now, this is our night of rest and jollity. To-morrow you will be on the march once more, to reach the Struma water sleeve and recover the gold coins. You know I told you that you must go after the gold instead of Ivan, for Vasko knows somehow that Ivan hid it in the vicinity of the 'Turk's Head' cliff and his men will be watching for him and will shadow him if he appears in those parts. You must go yourself, and after Ivan has made certain that your cave is unoccupied and safe, he will come here for me. So this is our one jolly evening together."

His eyes smiled at her, but his lips were still serious.

"Speak, laugh!" she teased. "Or do you miss your vespers? Wouldn't I do for an icon? What do you think?"

She assumed a benignant, eyes-turned-up-to-heaven attitude, her hands folded piously, but the corners of her mouth twitched and her fluttering eye-lashes mocked his melancholy.

"They'll make a female saint of me, see if they don't, when I've been dead a thousand months! Saint Adeline," she mock-meditated, "wouldn't it look fine in the calendar? Some jealous priest will be sure to shove my name-day into the middle of March. And peasants will make pilgrimages to your cave, and just think of the holy stories they'll be telling about you and me, Boyan! 'When Saint Adeline in sore tribulation reached the humble cave of the Holy Man of Vishny—that would make a capital name for you—she was weary and heavy-laden with grief and much sadness; and full tenderly did the Holy Man tend and solace the saintly Saint Adeline in her grief-laden sorrow!'"

But he snatched at her wrists and clasped them almost roughly, drawing her to him:

"You mocking witch, you—you impossible—darling!" he cried at her. "Why do you make a sport of what is holy?"

She opened her mouth to answer, but he shook her violently.

"No more jesting; you know I do not mean saints, male or female: something holy, sacred to me, something which has burned within me day and night since that morning;—something which was sacred to you also, once,—too long ago!"

"Boyan, don't!" She trembled and tried vainly to release her wrists.

"Something which has consumed my life and changed me entire, made the eremite once more a warrior, for your sake——"

"Stop, Boyan,—stop," she pleaded. "I don't want that. Not for my sake, Boyan; not for my sake merely!"

"Yes, for your sake, Ada. Do I love Macedonia less because it is your Macedonia? In Macedonia I see you, in fighting for Macedonia I'll fight for you—and I'll fight well, Adalena. But look at me at least once, at me, Boyan, not at your new convert to the Cause."

Still he held her wrists, his eyes burning into her own, but she was silent as death, only her arms were rigid and held him off.

"Am I just one more rifle to you, just one more man to count on—just one more? I am not. I will not be. My every thought is a dream of you."

"Dream of Macedonia first," she cried.

"Of you first, Ada. And to you also Macedonia shall be second, is second, to me. I'll make it second to me! I will. You have torn my soul to shreds, you have robbed me of my peace: you must give me instead——" he broke off. "Why did you save me then, if I was second to Macedonia in your heart? Why did you risk your life and Ivan's, when Macedonia needed you both, in order to save me, a chattering ascetic, as you

dubbed me? Why did you risk precipitating a massacre by burning a troop of Turks alive, and allow me to brain an innocent fisherman for a half-rotten pine-board, just to save an unwilling convert to your cause, a masquerading *komitaji*? Why—tell me?"

"You had given yourself to the Turks in my stead," the girl recited uncertainly, still holding him off.

"Was that all?" He gazed keenly at her pale face. "Was that all, Adalena?"

She avoided his gaze obstinately and stared into the brazier.

"Yes—I'm sure—I—that is, unless maybe it was the hope that perhaps—some day—for Macedonia's sake——"

Suddenly he released her wrists and clasped her face between his hands.

"It is a lie, if you say it is all. I know it is a lie. Tell me the rest, Adalena; tell me again what you told me that night by the fire-glow. Tell me you love me!"

"Oh, leave me alone. Please, Boyan, leave——"

"I will not, dearest. Say you love me."

"I—I do; you know I love you, Boyan," she whispered faintly. "But—Macedonia——"

"No 'buts,'" he whispered fiercely. "I have worshipped Causes all my life. You are the first living happiness I have ever known. You must be, you shall be, you are my own, only mine!"

Say you love me first, say it, and your Macedonia will be mine. But say it, say it! Kiss me back, if you do, Adalena!"

He held her close, close, until her heart trembled, breathless, within her. She bit her lips tightly, gritted her teeth, her face rigid, *résistant*. But his kisses burned like melting fire on her eyes and cheek and neck; her forbidding lips trembled wistfully, eagerly, thirstily . . .

"Boyan!" she murmured, and her lips met his.

CHAPTER XXXV

A VULTURE SWOOPS

THE single small window of the Huntsman's cabin glowed with a dim red translucence. A thick curtain might have blinded this tell-tale eye; but, secure in the remoteness of the hut and the wildness of the night, neither Adalena nor Boyan had thought of drawing that curtain. They had tramped for days over tortuous mountain trails, with scanty food and uncertain rest, and now, in the cozy warmth of the charcoal brazier, they slept soundly.

Outside the wind blew with unabated fury; it broke the dry spruce twigs and swept them up in dirty drifts over the white, hard-crusting snow. The pale sheen of a moon dying behind the scurrying clouds added a weird, uncanny touch to the highland wilderness.

A louder footfall might have creaked over the snow without wakening the sleepers. Vasko's was a footpad-step, and he started in surprise as he came around the corner of the cabin and saw through the branches the reckless glow of the window-pane. His crunching step softened, he

glided cautiously over the crusty snow, and drew his head to a level with the window. If Ivan were alone, and asleep,—he peered more closely as he caught sight of the two forms prostrate on the floor. The brazier-coals, dimly glowing at their feet, did not allow a clear view of their faces. Vasko wondered who Ivan's guest might be, when the nearer of the two sleepers turned over, and in the gleam of a charcoal that crumbled to pieces at that moment, the man at the window saw her long braids of hair. Vasko knew of only one woman who could enjoy the hospitality of the unromantic Huntsman. But Adalena's ubiquity shocked him.

"Everywhere you are in my way," he muttered angrily. "Bah," he scoffed, "one watchful puppy is a match for twenty sleeping hounds," and his eyes narrowed with cunning as he watched their sound sleep.

Around his shoulder, Vasko always carried a thin but very stout hempen rope. Ropes had served him in good stead more than once, when a dizzy cliff yawned before him and the patter of pursuing Turkish horsemen reached his ears. The rope would do for the Huntsman; his guest could be secured with a tough cord.

He lifted the latch gingerly and held the door while he pushed it open. Tiptoeing to what he thought was the Huntsman, he slipped one end of the rope beneath his ankles, knotted it loosely enough not to press, and yet so tight that it could

not slip off. Leaving plenty of length, he cut off the rest of the rope and crept to the sleeper's head.

The strange face gave him a shock; he drew back for a moment. But this was no time for uncertainty; he would have enough time to identify the stranger and his relation to Adalena after he had bound him. The hands were more difficult to deal with, but Vasko had bound hands before, and Boyan only sighed, turned over, and fell into a deeper slumber.

The last part was hardest of all. Lifting Boyan bodily, Vasko tucked a slip-noose underneath his armpits and threw the opposite end of the rope over the short cross-beam near one of the logs that supported the rafters. A board creaked under his foot; he stepped aside too quickly; his sandal landed on the wooden bowl, slipped; the bowl rolled away noisily.

"What!"

The brigand turned with a start. Adalena was sitting up, blinking at him. Vasko rushed at her and pressed the cold revolver-barrel to her mouth.

"*Sst!*" he hissed, "not one syllable. Hands up."

The hollow end of a gun does not conduce to deliberation. Adalena, dazed, still half-asleep, obeyed mechanically. She felt the grip of a strong hand on her right wrist, the rough, ticklish touch of hemp. He would have bound her hand and foot without her making a sound, had he not

turned against the light and revealed his face.

"It's you?" she gasped; then, "Boyan! Boyan!" she screamed at the top of her voice. "No, you will not shoot," she cried at Vasko. "Boyan, wake up! *Boyan!*" She struggled madly to free herself, but the brigand pressed her down to the floor. The hemp cord cut into her flesh like rusty files; a sudden pull backwards left her helpless, unable to move her hands. He felt for some rag to gag her, but she bit and tore like a tigress at bay.

"*Boyan!*" He woke at last with a start, but Vasko caught the end of the rope that hung over the rafter and jerked him off the floor. Boyan dangled helplessly against the log.

"Vasko!" Adalena cried. "What do you want?"

"A very simple thing, Adalena Andreyeva," he answered with a grim laugh. "But first, who is this comrade of yours?"

"An honest man who does not make the liberation of Macedonia a matter of traffic."

"You are giving him a pretty good recommendation, *Dulgokossa*; but a little matter of traffic he can not afford to scorn just at present."

He stirred up the brazier fire until the charcoals burned brightly, piled more charcoal on top, then whipped out his revolver and caressed the shining barrel.

"Now then, Mr. Honest Man, let me have a better look at you. Whatever your business may

be outside this hut, your business here, waiting for Ivan the Huntsman, can only be the same as his. Make it my business also, and in a hurry."

"What are you talking about?" Boyan parried. "What can a Bulgar possibly want of me?"

"The directions to the precise spot near the 'Turk's Head' cliff where one thousand pounds in gold are huddling together this cold night, Mr. Honest Man."

"But, Vasko," Adalena interrupted, "that money is already pledged to the Cause. If we let you use it now, bit by bit, of what use was all our risk?"

"Mademoiselle," Vasko made a mock-bow, "your type of revolutionaries do enjoy discussions. Just at present I am not at all interested to learn which is the best and quickest way to liberate Macedonia. All I want to know is the exact location of that money."

"You will not get that information," Boyan spoke calmly. "In the second place because I shall not tell you, and in the first place because my comrade here does not know anything about it."

Adalena wondered at the convincing simplicity of his manner. But Vasko was no sixty-year-old Murad Pasha. He sneered at the hemp-bound man.

"You talk as though you held this shining house-for-six instead of me. In the second place,

you won't tell, and in the first place, she doesn't know? Well, Mr. Honest, the first I don't believe, and the second I'll find out." He tickled Boyan's nose with the cold barrel of death.

"Oh, you are not going to shoot," Boyan laughed.

"I'm not," Vasko snarled. "But I know various ways of singeing an obstinate man."

He put the revolver in his belt, and went over to the brazier. The pile of fresh charcoal had just caught. The brigand shoved the red-hot mass under Boyan's feet.

"Now you will talk," he sneered savagely.

A shiver went through the bound man's frame, wracking every fiber; the heat was insufferable. It penetrated through his sandaled feet; it permeated skin and flesh and bone-marrow. The charcoal fumes stupefied him; his eyes began to blink, to close.

"Vasko, are you a Turk?" Adalena writhed to free herself from the cords. "Don't burn him alive, Vasko; he has had nothing to do with that money, he has never touched it."

Vasko whirled on her:

"Then you tell me," he cried.

"But I don't know just where it is," she parried.

"Not exactly, perhaps, but you know how to get there. Look here, Adalena Andreyeva, your father was against me for twenty years, and called me a brigand, when I should have been his

chief. He distrusted me, he checked me at every turn; but I've drunk water from hoof-prints long enough. It is I who have you checked now, and you shall answer for him."

The odor from the singeing leather sickened the girl; she could see Boyan's defiant effort for control.

"Is your jaw thawed out by this time, Mr. Honest?" Vasko sang out to him.

"I'm afire!" the man groaned.

"Oh, no, you aren't; I'll see to that. But you'll be the next thing to it for an hour, until your tongue begins to blister. Where is that money hidden?"

"Move this fire away and I'll talk."

Adalena shuddered at the words, gasped. She dared not look at him. Could he betray—and yet the spectacle of his agony tortured her until she forgot her own pain. But how could he give in so readily? She looked at him: a most reassuring smile flashed for a second in his eyes as they met hers. She waited, breathless.

"Move this fire away, I tell you, and let me down, and I shall talk," Boyan repeated.

Vasko shoved the brazier aside and loosened the rope. Boyan took a deep breath and sighed in relief.

"It is"—Adalena trembled—"where you couldn't find it in a year of Sundays," Boyan finished.

"How far from the 'Turk's Head' cliff?"

"Less than a week's journey."

"Where, you 'honest' rascal,— exactly where?"

"Gently, gently, brigand. What will you do if I don't tell you?"

"Toast both of you alive, one after the other."

"And kill us if I do tell you. So there's poor choice as far as that goes."

"Leave off your philosophizing and speak up, or I'll lose my patience with both of you."

"Oh, you are wasting your time with her," Boyan declared. "But I shall tell you where the money is, the exact place,—on one condition."

"It is——?" Vasko drew closer.

"That you first set my comrade free."

"Boyan!" Adalena gasped, but he paid no attention to her.

"Bring her here to me; give me ten minutes of undisturbed conversation with her,—fifteen minutes. Then let her leave the hut, well provided with food, while you stay with me. Ten hours from the time she crosses the threshold, you will have your secret, and my life."

Vasko laughed in derision.

"Give Adalena Andreyeva a ten hours' start! You poor fool! You think I'm as credulous as all that? By the time I've succeeded in opening your jaw, she'll have got the money herself."

Adalena trembled like a leaf; her tongue seemed tied, she could not utter a word. She felt confusedly that some gigantic scheme lurked

behind Boyan's words, but the words themselves, the utter self-extinction of him, melted her whole being to tears of love and admiration. Why was he so anxious to convince Vasko that she knew nothing about the money? Once more she heard him, in tones of clearest simplicity:

"I've told you she knows nothing about the matter. You might torture her and she might give you some directions, wrong ones, to be rid of you,—but you simply can not learn the truth from her. So set her free."

"And she will bring a pack of your wolfish comrades here before dawn," Vasko protested.

"Don't talk drivel. This hut is a whole day's journey from a living soul in weather like this."

Vasko laughed out once more.

"You do think me a fool, don't you, Mr. Honest? She is the only lever I can use to pry your mouth open. Oh, I see all right: I'm an old dog, but my eyes can tell a lover's face when they see one. How am I to know you'll give me the right directions after she is once safe?"

"You can take me with you, bound and gagged. One can go to the spot from this hut without crossing a village or passing in sight of a house."

"And even if I do take you with me, how do I know that you will not lead me into a trap? Do you think I'd trust you that far?"

Boyan smiled defiantly.

"You don't have to. Those are my conditions."

Vasko considered. Time was pressing; any moment might bring Ivan the Huntsman in, and change the odds against him.

"Will you tell Adalena Andreyeva of the hiding place if I free her?"

"No."

Again Vasko considered.

"You must do it and do it soon," Boyan urged him, "for her hands are blue with your hemp cords. Otherwise, go as far as you like with me, you'll learn nothing." And he closed like a clam.

"Well," Vasko concluded, "all right. I can always kill you if you lie to me."

He raised the girl to her feet. A girl she was, slender, ashy-white in the charcoal-glow which played darkly about her figure. She rushed towards him, but stopped half-way, mutely appealing. In her most passionate words about Macedonia, Boyan had never seen that look in her eyes. It smote him to the heart, and his face blazed with the pent-up fires of thwarted love and hate. But Vasko looked on, half-amused, half-impatient, and Boyan banished all emotion from his face.

"Unbind her," he said dryly.

The brigand did not move.

"Are you afraid of a girl? Forgive me, Ada!"

Vasko spat contemptuously and set her free.

"Boyan!" she threw her arms about him, her lips murmuring passionate words of love and

death and agony. Boyan's whole being trembled with the maddening sense of baffled intensity; his muscles were tense; his breathing quick and sharp, as his body strained against the hempen rope that pinned him to the log.

"Ada *moya*," he whispered as in a delirium, and a new light shone in his face. "I give you freedom. For Macedonia's sake, Ada."

"I love you, you, you, my brave lad!" she almost wailed. "I know you will lead him astray," she whispered.

"No whispering," Vasko cried, and drew closer.

"The money, Ada? He will not get it. Near the 'Turk's Head' cliff——"

"*Sst!*" Vasko hissed. But Boyan ignored him and went on, in low undertones.

"Look out, Ada. Not so close. It—burns," he almost breathed in her ear.

Vasko, suspicious, came nearer and nearer, eager not to lose a word of the conversation. The two were absorbed in each other, apparently oblivious of his presence.

Adalena felt Boyan's knees move every moment or two. The smell of charcoal-singed sandals was now mixed with a new odor—the odor of burning rope.

"The ankle," Boyan breathed in her ear.

In an instant she knew his meaning. She dared not look at his foot, where the hemp rope, overheated, burned slowly; but she almost felt the

heat eat its way through his bonds. Freedom drew closer and closer,—and closer crept Vasko——

“Near the ‘Turk’s Head,’ Ada, the Struma River——”

Suddenly Boyan’s body heaved mightily; his straining calf-muscles felt all bonds torn; his right sandaled foot shot at Vasko’s stomach like a battering-ram. Vasko’s legs slipped from under him, his pistol flew across the hut, he lunged, tripped, grabbed at something.

“Quick, Ada,” Boyan shouted. “Quick, cut the ropes!”

Adalena looked about feverishly. Across Vasko’s prostrate form, by the stone shelf, she saw the knife where she had left it in preparing supper. She dashed for it. But the brigand, stunned momentarily, had recovered his presence of mind, and barred her way.

“Not so easily won, children!”

He grabbed the girl’s wrist and rushed across the room for his revolver. Then catching up a blanket, he wrapped it tightly around her, picked her up in his arms, and threw open the door.

“You’ll not be the first of your breed to hang,” he called back to Boyan. “When Ivan finds you, Mr. Honest, tell him I’m trying to see if Adalena is worth one thousand pounds in gold to the Cause. Ten days I’ll wait for the ransom. The Huntsman knows my haunts.”

The door swung to, and latched.

"Tell him, Ada, tell him," Boyan's voice reached her ears, as the door banged shut.

"Tell him, tell him," the wind caught it up and tossed it from hemlock to hemlock.

CHAPTER XXXVI

BRIGANDAGE AND REVOLUTION

WAS it the bright flame on her face or the hard, cold stones beneath her that brought Adalena to herself? She lay very still, trying to figure it out. A rough stone ceiling claimed her vision overhead; she tried to turn on her side and look toward the fire, but tight cords bruised her wrists and ankles as she moved. Like a flash, the night came back to her. She could recall everything up to the point when the door banged shut on him, and the wild wind moaned out to her in Boyan's tones:

"Tell him, Ada. Tell him."

And now? She turned her head cautiously. A pile of blankets and dried balsam boughs lay heaped in a corner; beyond them a ragged icon dangled disconsolately by one corner over a small shelf holding a burned candle. Adalena sat up in amazement.

"Boyan!" she exclaimed.

The fire crackled briskly between her and the cave-entrance, and a bulky figure nodded beside it. At her cry, Vasko half rose, stretched himself, and yawned drowsily.

"Not Boyan," he sneered. "But I'm glad you have come to."

He stepped to the pile of dried balsam and tossed an armful on the fire. The flame bit greedily through the fragrant twigs; it must have been such a flame that had brought the girl back to waking realities. But how long it had been since she heard Boyan's last call, and how had they come to the cave?

By the light beyond the fire, she imagined it must be early morning. Whatever Vasko's intentions toward her were, she must find them out at once. She felt weak, ill, and strangely unnerved. It taxed her strength to rise to her feet, but her voice was cool enough.

"Well, Vasko, what do you want with me?"

"What do I want, Adalena Andreyeva? You do like to ask that question. Answer it for yourself. I want that money."

"Boyan told you I know nothing about it," she protested.

"And I believed him, because it suited my plans to try him first. Now you have your turn,—speak up."

"And if I refuse to tell you?" she asked quietly.

He sprang at her with an angry snarl, clutched her shoulders with his calloused hands, and shook her roughly.

"Then I'll make you," he cursed through gritted teeth.

For the first time in her venturesome life, Adalena felt completely trapped. Taken for a man, one could stand out, bluster; one could defy one's captors, but a woman's defiance was pitiful, ludicrous, hopeless. A horror, such as she had felt only once before, on the mountain-path in her childhood, when Salih Effendi pursued her, numbed her soul now as she surveyed her estate: helpless, bound, and utterly at an outlaw's mercy. Even if she betrayed the secret, what assurance of safety would she have? And even if she had it, what would life, and honor itself, be worth at such a price? Her life he might have, but—Once more he shook her, and she shuddered under his grasp.

"How can you make me?" she barely breathed the words.

He looked at her keenly; then his face grew very grave and he dropped his hands.

"My methods are legion," he said, "but none of them what you imagine. Listen. I knew a woman once, a Greek woman, more luscious than the apples of Paradise, lithe and supple as a *rus-salka*, and as luring.

"Fool, fool that I was, to believe she could share my shoulder with a revolutionist's rifle! And share it she did, until she wormed out of me the secret which her Turkish retainer wanted. Then she—betrayed me." He shivered at the recollection. "Turkish police were never so close to my heels before, or since; but once across

the border, on the cold slabs of St. John's at the Rila Cloister, I kissed the Book and vowed that so long as I lived I would not look on a woman again. No man joins my band until he takes that vow.

"So try none of your wiles on me, Adalena Andreyeva," he added fiercely. "You are ugly, anyway, and—my methods are of sterner stuff."

He walked up and down the narrow space by the fire.

"Why should I have to torture you at all?" he suddenly burst out. "Why do you, and Demeter, and all of you, hold me off as an outlaw and a brigand, when, after all, your enemy is mine? The purpose of your whole life is the purpose of mine—eternal warfare against the Turk."

"Warfare is not my purpose," the woman protested. "Peace is my goal. You keep Macedonia in a ferment. You stir up the Turks here, they send an army to subdue you; by the time the troops arrive, you are far away, stirring up trouble in another district."

"Precisely," Vasko exulted. "Never let them rest. Why, woman, our will-o'-the-wisp revolts have bankrupted the Ottoman Empire. Armies after armies: they—they can't get at us! We've drained Asia Minor——"

"You have, and while you eluded the Turks, they've sucked the very life-blood of our peasantry. You sing and dance atop your crags, but

plowing men and women down in the valleys have to pay the piper. And you glory in it, in this sort of costly unrest, which kills, while it brings them no nearer freedom to-day than they were five hundred years ago? Your brigandage exhausts the Bulgar peasantry; it touches the Turks as little as they touch you."

"Not at all!" Vasko snapped. "We are draining the Sultan's army. The Turk makes a great show, but—his stomach is empty."

"He is always sure to fill it," the woman interrupted.

"Of course,—the hungrier he gets, the more he devours Macedonia. But in time, *in time*, Adalena, Europe will get tired of this blood-feast. Then Europe will strike,—and the Turk will cave in: because you have preached? No, because we have exhausted him."

"But true freedom, Vasko——"

He cut her short. "True freedom, or any other freedom isn't to be got by preaching. Preach freedom!" he laughed in derision. "Look at the Macedonian emigrants in Bulgaria. Educated, prosperous, clean-shaven,—they would draw their skirts about them if they saw me coming their way. Teachers they are, professors, diplomats, journalists, lawyers, merchants: their mouths and pens weep for Mother Macedonia, but they keep their finger-nails clean.

"They send delegations to this king and that—travel first class, too—or they organize parades

and mass-meetings of refugees; but they buy their farms and build their brick houses in Sofia, Adalena. Do you think their smug, portly persons will make Europe turn an ear to their woman-hearted petitions? No, girl, Europe will turn her eyes to Macedonia only when the blood-smell gets too strong for her nose. If affairs are bad enough long enough——”

“An idiotic dream, Vasko,” she burst out. “You ought to know better. Europe is indifferent to Turkey’s drink until she herself wishes to sip it. If Macedonia is ever to be free, Bulgars and only Bulgars must strike the blow. And that we can not do until all Macedonia is ready, until we can all rise at once.”

“But that will take years——”

“Let it. We must plan, train, we must keep the Turk complacent, unsuspecting, while we gather our strength, and then, when the day comes, Vasko, organized and ready, we shall set Turkey quaking all over!”

“Our bands——”

“Hear me out, Vasko. Your bands have hampered and skulked away for centuries. That sort of thing is futile. Turkdom is hollow, you say? All the more shame on us that we should thump it, instead of crushing. Wait, Vasko,” she insisted, “wait until we can strike all along the line, from the Black Sea to Lake Ochrid: then the Turk can not chop us up one by one.”

“But to do this?”

"To do this, we must conserve every ounce of strength, every single piaster."

He scoffed. "Your plan is wilder than mine," he said. "Four generations will not find Macedonia ready for such a struggle, and four generations of quiet will give Turkey strength enough to crush fourteen Macedonias."

He shrugged his shoulders contemptuously and poked at the fire.

"But what is the use? This argument is as old as Macedonia, and as futile. I have my band—we need funds. We might rob a Turk to get it; why don't you prevent a massacre, then, by sharing your booty with us?"

"It is the principle——" Adalena began.

"I am weary to death of your principles! Principles and by-laws and *ustavi* you elaborate, rules and regulations, and you forget the daily sufferings of live men and women. For the sake of a bloodless principle, you would hand me over to the first Turkish *zaptieh*. But I'd like to see Akiff Pasha himself try to touch you with his little finger!

"Now, are you or are you not going to tell me where that money is? Tell me, and you are free; refuse, and—it is a seven hours' tramp to our next place. People have gone there who never returned."

The girl looked at him steadily, but made no answer.

"Are you going to tell?"

Her eyes shifted to the cave opening and to the sky beyond.

"If it is a seven hours' tramp," she uttered the words syllable by syllable, "we had better be starting. It may snow before night."

But Vasko whirled savagely and strode to the mouth of the cave. He glowered at the sky, then his glance wandered over the deep forest ahead.

"What was that?" he hissed.

Like lightning, his revolver flashed in his hand, cocked and pointed. He held its mate, ready, in his left hand.

"Stand out!" he called defiantly and covered the spot where a head had dodged behind a huge pine-trunk. "Stand out, or I fire!"

"At him, Costi, Osman Effendi! Rush him!" Selim Bey called in triumph. "He's trapped at last. I can see him by the fire—alone—with a woman!"

Three pistols cracked at the same instant, and the three men dashed at the cave. Vasko had to fire in all directions at once, but not at random: old Costi fell, biting the snow.

"Here, Ada," the brigand shouted, holding out the revolver in his left hand. "Take it quickly, I'm hit."

She could only reach her two bound hands toward him.

"I'm tied, Vasko!" she cried piteously.

Even as she spoke, he lunged forward: the finger clutching the trigger pulled convulsively,

and Vasko's last cartridge scraped the rock before the cave-mouth.

Adalena staggered against the stone-ledge, her fingers searching vainly for the tiny phial that never before had been missing from its pocket. She had left it in the peasant jacket, lying in Ivan's hut.

"Boyan! Boyan!" her parched lips cracked as they uttered the name. She raised her eyes—and looked into the puffy, curious eyes of Selim Bey.

CHAPTER XXXVII

DICE AND THE WOMAN

“**A**T last I’m sure of my man,” Selim exclaimed, “and——” He bowed sweepingly to Adalena. “A good start for my harem, Osman—eh?”

Osman stood slightly behind him, studying Adalena with a cool, calculating glance. At Selim’s words, he turned on him sharply.

“Your harem, Selim Bey? Well, hardly. I didn’t come all this way in the winter-time to domesticate you, old reprobate! This woman may be connected in some way with our young, make-believe merchant. Anyway, she is a jewel; Akiff Pasha will pay a good price for her, I feel sure. If he doesn’t want her——” Osman’s eyes lingered appraisingly on their captive.

“But we’ve caught her in my district!”

“But she’s my chase!”

Selim tugged at his waxed mustache and scowled into the fire. To be thwarted in this matter meant more than he cared to let Osman know. After the misadventure at Ivko’s inn, Selim had not felt inclined to stop and consult

with his father in his mad chase after the two fugitives. Costi's depositions had stirred him to immediate action, for the *bash-komitaji's* escape was very likely still a secret, though he could not be sure. Secrets do leak out in Turkey; in spite of the best precautions; somebody or other is sure to blab.

He felt pretty certain what sort of a reception awaited him at his father's house. His inferiors would laugh behind his back; his equals would scorn him; but his father would be furious. Behind the Pasha's back, Selim could mock at his addled management, but the son still had a very wholesome fear of Murad's justifiable rage. The only way he could return to his old standing in his father's palace would be to enter Goreno with the monk a corpse and this mysterious woman his captive. The *bash-komitaji* dead would be more valuable to Murad than the girl alive, but the capture of both would deprive Akiff Pasha and his men of any chance to brag about the matter. These maddening visions had led him on resistlessly through the wild pursuit of the fugitives,—something led him insistently to the cave where the monk had first been captured,—and now at the moment of triumph, Akiff's lieutenant himself coveted and menaced his coup.

The situation was baffling indeed; Akiff was Murad's superior; the *bash-komitaji* himself was under orders to him; and this woman was a mere female to him until Osman had suggested her

possible connection with the fugitive from Uskub. Very plainly he could not defy Osman Effendi with impunity. But uncertainty of his being able to keep his prize made him the more loath to lose it.

Suddenly he whirled and slapped Osman on the shoulder.

"I have it," he cried. "Not a living soul knows of all this but you and me. We'll settle it between us." He took a dice-box from his pocket and shook it. "Let the points be one hundred. The first one to get five-score, gets the prize."

Osman hesitated. While he was pretty sure of getting the girl in the end, he was not at all certain of the lengths to which Selim might go to keep her. Besides, Osman had all the delight of a fatalist Oriental in the fall of the dice, and the stakes were worth tossing for.

"Let us stir up the fire, then," he said. "This cold would freeze hell itself."

They dragged the rest of the balsam bed and the dried sticks across the cave.

"Pile it on, pile it on," Osman urged. "You can't set this stone hole afire."

"It's all for you, my bird," Selim smirked at Ada. "Come," he said, going toward her, "just one kiss for luck."

"Get back here, Selim Bey!" Osman snarled at him. "You don't know whose she is yet."

Selim turned on his heel and sat down cross-

legged before Osman. He took the dice-box out of his pocket, rattled it gaily, and spilled its contents on the floor. Five and one blinked up at him.

"Not a bad start, Osman,—what?" he asked.

"Watch this one!" Osman scored ten points. Selim snatched the cubes and shook them vigorously.

"Twelve!" he cried. "Eighteen in all. He can't equal that—eh, my peasant beauty?" He nodded and winked at Adalena.

Osman did not equal it at the next throw, but for five successive trials after that, Selim could not get more than ten points. Osman's count mounted steadily. He reached sixty, and Selim Bey still lagged through the thirties. It was his chance at the dice. He shook them madly, then very gently, turning them over and over in the box, trying to poise them on the corner and let them fall.

"There now," he dumped them at last. "This will add me twelve points or I'm a——"

"You are," Osman roared with laughter. One black eye blinked again from each yellow ivory cube.

Osman gave the dice a careless toss. A six-and-four came on top. "Who will start his harem first, Selim? Yes?"

Selim shoved another stick on the fire and poked at the coals.

"I say, Osman," he argued, "you're winning

too easily. The girl's worth more. Let's make the stakes two hundred points."

"No such thing," Osman laughed the easy laugh of a winner. "Stakes are stakes, and you knew the prize before you set them."

"If we weren't playing for the girl, we'd be playing for something else," Selim coated his anxiety with a fine indifference. "I like the game myself. You haven't won yet, anyway; my luck may turn at the next throw."

"Try and see if it will," Osman pushed the dice forward, but Selim did not touch them.

"There's no hurry about getting back," he parried. "It will make a fine show for either of us to enter Gorenno at twilight, and both of us don't want to be here with her after the game is won. Come, let's play a while longer."

Osman considered. After all, chance was chance, and Osman did not want to provoke Selim Bey now.

"Let it be two hundred then," he said. "Hurry up."

Selim tossed the box into the air, the dice tumbled about and fell with eleven spots on top.

"*Zzum!* Now don't you see! Come on, you grasshopper—show what you can do."

Osman threw cautiously, the count was low. Again and again the dice rattled, but the luck had changed. Selim leaped along; Osman lagged behind. His temper shortened with his luck.

"One hundred and fifty for me," Selim shook

with merriment. "Finest game I know, Osman." He tossed a kiss to Ada. "You see your lord, my darling: The best dice-thrower in Macedonia!"

"Stop that," Osman growled at him. "The count is going to be three hundred."

"Three hundred? Too much, Osman. Who wants a game of dice strung on like a Christian funeral? Do we now, my *giaur* nightingale?"

"The count is three hundred," Osman repeated. "And another thing, Selim. You don't know whether she is your nightingale or mine. If she belongs to you, you'll have time enough for your twittering, but if she doesn't, you haven't any business smirking at her like a silly, moon-struck rustic that has never seen anything but pantaloons."

"What do you want, anyway, Osman?" Selim fretted. "It's bad enough to raise the count when I've almost won, but you won't even let me look at my prize."

"Are you a donkey after a carrot, Selim Bey? Leave the girl alone."

"Then let the stakes be two hundred and fifty."

"They will be three hundred," Osman closed.

It was no use arguing; Murad's eldest tugged at his mustache ends pettishly, but he could think of no way of getting the better of his superior's lieutenant. At last he turned about with his back to the girl, and picked up the dice.

"You turn about too, then," he demanded of Osman.

"All right, but it happens to be my throw," Osman remarked coolly, and took the cubes from the Bey's hand. Selim shrugged his shoulders and bent over the game.

Luck was inconstant, first one gained, then the other. The two Turks became absorbed completely in the game. Neither spoke a word.

Leaning against the back-ledge of the cave, the woman watched the progress of the gamble as a trapped mouse might watch the mewling parade of a couple of foms about its trap. Since the first throw, she had scarcely moved a step. The rapid succession of captors had stunned her, and she trembled between the wild hope of an impossible rescue and black despair. If Boyan could by any chance have got free,—but would he dream of hunting for her in the cave!

She stole unnoticed moments and strained fiercely at the cords that held her bound; but wrists and ankles were too numb and sore to exert much pressure, the blue veins only swelled into purple cords, and, exhausted, she leaned back against the wall and gasped with the sharpness of the pain. Her throat was parched for water; in spite of the cold, her blood ran fire-hot through her limbs and pounded at her temples.

"Caught, caught, caught," the words throbbed pulse-like in her brain. She had no chance for argument here—the end of the game would be

the end of everything. She was no more than the hundred hundred Macedonian girls who had gone down into the same hideous darkness. Escape? The word mocked at her, tantalized her. In a despair of madness, she bit at the cords, trying to gnaw through thread after thread, but the hemp was hard iron.

From where she stood, Adalena could look around the end of the huge boulder that blocked the cave's broad mouth and see through the narrow, slit-like entrance. The distance seemed pitifully short, and neither of the Turks had noticed it apparently. She might creep to it unperceived. But even if she could get outside, how could she ever crawl to a hiding-place in time?

"Two hundred," Selim grunted. "Allah, I wish this were the end."

Adalena looked again toward the narrow patch of blue and white beyond the opening, and into the dark gray-green of the pines which separated sky and snow-covered mountain. She strained her eyes to catch a glimpse of any moving creature, she pressed her ear against the cave wall to hear the softest footfall. She could distinguish nothing but her own heart-beat.

Was it the pressure of a foot on the dry snow? She bit her lip tightly and closed her eyes to listen the more intently. Did the footfall come again, or was it merely her own imagination?

"What was that?" Adalena thought the question so hard she was sure she must have screamed

the words, but neither of the Turks moved. Osman went on tossing in his usual cool, complacent way; Selim leaned over to catch the first glimpse of the cubes as they tumbled on the rocks. Evidently neither had heard a sound, but to the woman the twig had broken like a clap of thunder. The silence that followed was full of waiting; neither she nor the intruder moved or breathed, and then——

Adalena was sure it was no trick of her imagination, somebody or something was coming—treading with slow, cautious, padded feet. They came from behind the cave, creeping nearer and nearer the slit between the rocks. The girl's eyes never left the opening; she wanted to see what the Turks were doing, but she dared not lose what might be but a second's glance.

"A few more like those two, and the darling is mine," Selim cried in exultation. "Say, Osman, you ought to let me have one look for two such throws as those."

Osman's answer was an angry growl. His luck had not changed markedly, and his eyes were dark and sour.

"Stick to your work," he said. "You'll have time enough for your smirking."

A wary cap crept around the rocky edge of the opening—a Balkan *kalpak*—and Ivan's eyes sought the woman in silent inquiry. She moved slightly until he could see the cords around her wrists and ankles.

Selim burst out in a round of profanities; Osman's luck had changed at last. In their excitement, the gamblers drew together until they were almost entirely on the other side of the fire. The end of the game was in sight.

Adalena sidled by imperceptible inches toward the opening; if she could once get through and Ivan cut those cords! Her progress was maddeningly slow. The Huntsman squeezed sideways through the fissure and crept forward to meet her. They guarded every footfall, not a loose pebble stirred, and the fire crackled and flamed in front of them. One yard more, two feet—one step. Ivan's huge clasp-knife was at the cords and the blood rushed freely again through wrists and ankles.

But the girl was almost as helpless as before. She did not dare take the pistol he held out to her, her hands were numb and useless. Ivan stooped slightly and gathered her up in his arms; then, as quietly but far more quickly, he covered again the space to the opening and shoved her through. Once there he turned back, undecided, his hand on the trigger of his gun. Adalena shook her head frantically.

"No, no," her lips framed the words, "Come!"

He slipped the weapon into his belt and slid outside.

"My horse is just below on the trail," he whispered. "I must carry you again."

"Two hundred and seventy-two," Osman shouted jubilantly in front of the fire.

Selim grabbed the bits of ivory and shook them madly. Three points——

"Aha, eighty!" Osman cried again.

"Eighty for me," Selim gasped.

"Eighty-seven," Osman crowded nearer.

"Eighty-nine," Selim shouted.

"Ninety-six," Osman laughed.

Selim shook the dice-box slowly, with maddening deliberation, sneering into Osman's face.

"This time you will not laugh!" he cursed. The dice rattled on the stones with a six and a five on top. Selim sprang up.

"Allah be merciful, Osman! She's gone!"

Blank amazement held them for a moment.

"Gone?" Osman repeated, his voice husky with superstitious fear. "She was tied!"

They rushed outside and searched on the snow for possible tracks. At the back of the cave, they saw the footprints leading off across the divide.

"Come, Osman, follow them."

Akiff's lieutenant turned on his heel and went back to the fire.

"Chase your own women. This is the last time I'll risk my skin for your bungling, Selim Bey," he retorted. "You've got your man, and as for girls—come to the next village. Take your carcass and let's make for Gorenno, or we'll be having a whole band about our ears before dark."

"What I can't understand, anyway," Selim

ruminated, coming back, "is why the girl was bound." He stooped and rolled the cold stiff body of the brigand over on his back. Osman saw him start with surprise, then look carefully at the dead man's features. When Selim rose, his face was pale with superstitious fright.

"Osman, let's be off," he whispered hoarsely. "They've changed him. He is another man."

Once more the low-hanging spruce branches before the cave parted, and Boyan hobbled through. He saw tracks everywhere, the smooth imprint of sandals almost trampled out by the hob-nailed pressure of heavy boots; and halfway up to the cave-opening, a ragged, dirty figure lay stretched face-downward. Across the cave's entrance he saw Vasko lying at full length. A little stream of blood oozed through his jacket and down upon the snow.

Boyan came up in a maze of bewilderment and rolled Costi over. The face seemed slightly familiar: where had he seen it before? He put his nose against the greasy jacket. "Fish!" he sniffed. Then Boyan remembered: the dirty shack, the sleepy, disheveled fisherman, the ice-bound Bistra River, the swaying plank! Evidently he had only stunned him. The old fellow had told someone—probably Selim Bey himself. The whole day's story rushed over him as he looked into Costi's wrinkled face.

Frantic with an unnameable possibility, Boyan

rushed into the cave. He found only his own abandoned trappings, the dying fire, and a pair of charred dice. There was something else.—He picked them up with trembling fingers. Adalena must have struggled desperately to stain those hemp-cords with so much blood.

Boyan's head swam. "Adalena, Ada mine," he cried in anguish. "I shall find you. Wherever your captors have taken you, I shall find you."

His first impulse was to follow at once, he could see by the foot-prints that the Turk party had been small. But where? To go directly and alone to Goreno was a fool's errand. He knew no one there, no one there had even heard his name. Ivan was the only man he knew who could put him in touch with the Goreno comrades and make Ada's deliverance possible.

In setting out for the cave, after his success in wriggling out of his bonds, Boyan had felt sure of finding the Huntsman there. But obviously Ivan had been delayed. Boyan's only course seemed to be to wait for him: but how costly, maddening the delay!

The wooden Saint John and the lithographed Virgin beamed piously in front of the burned candle—but the man had forgotten the monk. The cave itself was only her cave, her asylum once; now her prison, and who was her gaoler to-night?

He banished the dread words which shouted

themselves in his ears; a captive alone, not in Bulgar hands, perhaps in Selim Bey's, perhaps—God!

Boyan glanced down. The two figures lay stiff and stark before him, corpses on the ground which her feet had trod! He went first to Costi and lifted the old body on his shoulder. His feet were sore and he staggered once or twice, though the old man was not heavy.

At the cliff above the Ladna River, Boyan stopped and laid his burden on the brink of the chasm.

"You poor devil! Do you know whom you were pursuing?" he murmured. Then he shoved the body clear of the edge, and watched it drop through the ice.

But some distance from the cave he dug away the snow and hollowed a shallow grave among the rocks. It was slow, tiring work; the stones clung to the ice-filled earth, but at length it was done. He carried Vasko there, and, laying him down among the stones, heaped the rocks above him without a word.

He stood a moment looking down on the unhallowed grave.

"He may have fought for her," he half-whispered, and went back to the cave.

But it was drear, empty. The horrible idea of Adalena's probable fate overwhelmed him,—the hideous terror, the tragedy, the hopelessness of it! He paced up and down the hard, cold stones;

chill gusts of wind blew about the cold ashes of the balsam bed, which had been her couch.

Lost beyond deliverance! Each moment of thinking made thinking the vainer. The doors of the Gorenko *konak*, the heavy iron gates of despair, had they clanged behind Adalena? Suddenly the lunacy of his waiting struck him poignantly: what was he waiting for? What could Ivan do to help deliver her from that bondage? Gorenko could organize an attack on the palace—could it ever give her back to him alive, inviolate? Waiting was futile; and going—where could he go! He twitched in utter impotence.

“Lost beyond redemption!” He almost chanted it. His voice caught at the last word: “Redemption, redemption.” It sang itself mockingly in his brain. “Beyond redemption!”

Boyan stood very still. Redemption: Vasko had wanted a ransom! Then—why—why not? Floods of maddening ideas rushed over him; he stamped on the rocks, waved his hands, clutched his fingers, rumbled his hair, in a wild effort to think consecutively.

Vasko had wanted a ransom: and Vasko had known Adalena’s identity. Then why not Selim Bey—or whoever her present Turkish captor was? She must be a mere female trophy to the Turk. But one thousand pounds: who would take a mere one thousand pounds for such a woman? But to the Turk she would not be a woman, Boyan’s hope protested,—only a female!

One thousand pounds: half the price of Murad's projected summer house!

Boyan rushed from the cave and set out across the mountain-crest, which divided the Ladna valley from the valley of the Struma River.

"A forked pine—a dwarfed birch near the only beech-tree around!" he kept saying.

The thought that the hidden gold was sacred to the Cause never entered his mind. She was the Cause to him.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

VISIONS AND REVISIONS

MURAD PASHA sat before a low tabouret sipping his early morning coffee and puffing at his cigarette in turn. His wives fluttered about like so many gay silken butterflies, vying in their jealous zeal for serving their lord. Murad was giving his family a quite unusual attention; he generally preferred to be served elsewhere; but the cold of the January morning tormented his sixty-year-old joints, and the harem sitting-room was the most comfortable and the sunniest in the entire palace.

Mihirmah was the only one in the harem whom Murad's unusual benignity did not seem to rouse into action, and she was the only one who dared display such indifference. The Pasha of Gorenno was used to all sorts of moods from his presented *seraglio*-wife and was glad enough to avoid friction by leaving her to herself. Still, this morning he could not help being curious and not a little piqued at her complete absorption. Now and then he glanced where she leaned against one of the latticed windows and gazed steadily through

the harem-bars at the humming, buzzing Macedonian peasant-world that was going past.

It was market-day in Gorenno, to be sure, but Mihirmah must have watched hundreds of market-days from those very windows. Murad saw no reason for her interest at this particular time. He wanted to speak to her, but Mihirmah's answer was as likely to be a domestic bomb as a dutiful obeisance. Three other *Hanoums* were ready to retort to her first syllable, and Murad was anxious to enjoy peace for once. The very air he breathed reeked of explosives: he did not want them in his harem. So he sipped his coffee in silence, while Zayleh and Fatma Hanoum argued for first right, and the meek-eyed, yellow-skinned Sumruda, the second wife, served his breakfast.

Mihirmah herself could not have accounted for her determined abstraction. A peasant woman came down the street at an easy, swinging stride, intent on being the first to place her eggs and cheese on the market-place. Mihirmah watched the woman as she passed under the overhanging latticed windows. The peasant did not look up, and Mihirmah heard her jesting merrily with a passing donkey-driver, and go on, trudging under her load notwithstanding.

To be strong, free—to be able to do things! Mihirmah gazed off toward the blue, snow-capped mountains and the stretches of pasture and forest-land beyond the Ladna River. She

had been there—once. She shivered and thrilled at the same time at the thought of that wild evening—alone with Boyan on the upland trail, alone, with a sprained foot, carried along in his arms! The strong beat of his heart as he trod uphill and downhill,—his eyes of fire, and the black hair above them,—and then those others, the gray-beard, the sturdy old woman, the stalwart, shaggy son in the shepherd cabin! . . .

During all the cheerless, futile days since that wild night's escape and capture, Mihirmah had roamed about the women's quarters of the *konak* like some jailed spirit. Existence dragged like a log-chain on her soul, she hated opening her eyes in the morning. Even her imagination had deserted her: the fantasies that had beguiled former tedium seemed to have lost their lure. Only that one day and night, and the certainty of *haremlik* the rest of her days and nights!

The daughter of Stamboul *seraglios* and the *bash-komitaji's* comrade-for-a-day withered under a sense of injustice, a sense of being hopelessly, irremediably cheated.

"He told me I must earn freedom,—and life,—and power. I did earn it."

She watched the peasant woman as she praised her wares to this customer or that, and she hated her and her red jacket; hated the calloused hands, the strong, shapeless ankles, and the face stolid, not merely because it had faced wind and rain on the open pastures, but because stolidity had been

the one characteristic which had kept this woman, her parents, and her grandparents alive for five hundred years of Moslemdom.

Mihirmah hated this woman jealously, petulantly, without reason. "What has she ever done—this *giaur* peasant—that she can jest with donkey-drivers, and box her neighbor's ears, and be alive and strong and free?"

Mihirmah shuddered with disgust: what a blundering, bungling lunacy Kismet really was!

Her very immobility as she stood at the window wearied her. She must move, go somewhere, anywhere, as long as she was going; even if it were only up and down stairways, corridors, mountain-roads. . . .

She had quite forgotten Murad's presence, and her sudden whirl as she turned from the window brought her face to face with him. He had left his breakfast and was walking toward her, watching keenly the dark rebellious lines on her face. She met his glance squarely for an instant, coolly, defiantly—but only for an instant. Then her habitual look of easy languor veiled all trace of expression, and she bowed before the Goreno Pasha.

"I hope my lord has breakfasted to his liking," she droned.

"It would be by no virtue of yours if he had," Murad replied, and again their eyes met—with a glint of steel in the woman's to match the glassy stare of the man's.

"My son, my precious Selim," Fatma cried out, running to the door. "He is back, safe, well." She threw her arms about the youth's shoulders and embraced him in an ecstasy of delight.

Selim returned her embraces with the sort of cordiality which that young Bey had rarely shown toward any of his family; then advancing to his father, he bent respectfully over his hand and kissed it twice.

"The darling!" Fatma cried rapturously. "Is he not a son, my lord? Such a fine, sweet soldier!"

Murad looked at his eldest with a touch of suspicion; Selim's arrival was quite unexpected, his father had not looked for his return from Uskub before weeks had passed, and this sudden appearance in the harem, early in the morning, utterly unannounced and unaccompanied, put the old man on his guard. He had heard rumors. He motioned Fatma to be quiet, and asked curtly:

"Well, Selim, and what has Akiff done with my Master Rebel?"

Selim stared out of the window a moment and then boldly in his father's eyes.

"Akiff Pasha has not seen the Master Rebel."

"Not seen?" Murad gasped in dismay. "Not seen? Selim, are you telling me the truth? Where is the *bash-komitaji*?"

"Allah knows," Selim replied. "But any good Moslem could guess."

Murad staggered a little and sat down on the long divan.

"And your soldiers?" He looked at his son sternly. "Did you leave your soldiers in Uskub; did Akiff send you back alone to me?"

"I have returned alone," Selim replied very slowly, choosing his words, "because the soldiers escorted the *bash-komitaji*—up there." He jerked his thumb toward the ceiling.

Murad sank back trembling on the cushion, his fingers pulling aimlessly at the loose folds of his morning-coat, his face ashy. The rumor then was true——

Fatma ran up and pressed her cheek against his hands. Her own face was pale and anxious, while she pleaded:

"What does it matter, anyway, Pride of the Vardar?" she begged. "Soldiers? The Sultan has countless soldiers. And the *bash-komitaji* is dead. You may be glad—for Selim—our Selim, Murad. He is not hurt. See—he is——"

Murad pulled himself together and shook her off.

"I see he is not hurt," he said, glowering at his son. "So it is true; I thought it was a *giaur* lie before. That inn did burn,—and the soldiers and prisoner——" he broke off and paced the length of the room.

"I waited to hear from you," he went on, turning to his son, "then yesterday I sent Mustafa to investigate."

For the first time Selim seemed disturbed. He flushed and looked intently at the toes of his boots.

"And now, my young man," Murad struggled to keep down his temper, "tell me how you happen to be here in an undisturbed skin?"

"Murad," Fatma cried, "*I* am only glad he is here, safe. What if——"

"Hold your tongue, Fatma," Murad thundered. "Now answer me, you craven. Answer."

But Selim stared at his boot-tops and was silent.

"Perhaps the dear son heard of a fair in the village,—or maybe the peasants invited him to a wedding feast—'just to relieve the day's ennui.' Yes?"

Every one looked in amazement toward the alcove whence Mihirmah smiled blandly across at Selim. She had retreated into the bay-window when he entered and he had not noticed her before. His face crimsoned at her words, and his hand went involuntarily to his sword-hilt.

"Listen at that woman," Fatma shrilled jealously. "She would accuse my Selim of neglect, of desertion, of—of——" Fatma stopped as modesty bade her.

Mihirmah laughed contemptuously. The promise of a conflict thrilled her, she did not care in the least that the quarrel was not her own.

Murad watched the deep crimson of Selim's face die out.

"She is a clever vixen. Did she guess it?" he asked.

"And if she did?" Selim parried.

"If she did?" Murad's face grew livid with wrath. "Are you the Sultan's stallion that you prance about the country at your sweet will? What of the Master Rebel? What of Akiff Pasha? What of your silly governorship now? How long will I remain in Goreno when Akiff orders me a second time to send that man to Uskub, and there is no man to send?"

Selim turned to his father. "Akiff Pasha will not order you a second time, father," he said, smiling. "Akiff Pasha has let a *giaur* slip through his own fingers that he would turn the whole *vilayet* wrong-side-out to get hold of again."

Murad Pasha grabbed his son quickly by the shoulder.

"Are you sure, Selim?" he said eagerly. "It is not the first one. We may profit by this, my boy. We may profit. At least you did not lose our *bash-komitaji*, at least he is dead. The burning—that is a little thing. Perhaps necessary. You might have met a band on the way, who would have rescued him." Murad was thinking fast. "Yes, that was it. You suspected such a band—you had to order the inn burned to prevent the *bash-komitaji* from escaping. I see—I see. You're a clever boy, Selim. And Akiff's man—he got away?"

"But the fire?" Mihirmah interrupted again. "Tell us about the fire, Selim. Did you see the *bash-komitaji* burn up?"

Her manner was artfully innocent. Selim cursed this woman who knew when not to stop.

"See him?" he said scornfully. "How could I see him, Mihirmah *Hanoum*? Was I tied to the post, too?"

"Evidently not," she retorted. "Nor to any post."

Selim was tender; he winced in spite of his anger.

"But tell us about the fire," Mihirmah persisted. "Even your devoted mother would like to hear how bravely her darling fought the flames." Mihirmah's scorn was but thinly veiled; Fatma felt it and flared in defense.

"His mother does not want to know," she declared. "Why do you not order her to be quiet, Murad? She is only rousing my boy. She vexes us all the whole day long."

"Be still, mother," Selim replied for his father. "Who is afraid of her chatter?"

"Not Selim Bey, of course," Mihirmah put in. "Mihirmah knows nothing beyond four walls." She waved her hand languorously, her eyes half-closed. "But she learns some things now and then. Let's see—— If the soldiers were really drunk—with sleeping potions maybe, or something—and they could burn themselves up, why couldn't some one else have started the

fire? Then they may have appeared before Allah without their prisoner."

Selim glared at her, astonished and furious. She was a sorceress, this woman who tore his passions, read his nature, and mocked him to scorn. Old Murad, who had been mumbling and planning Akiff's confusion, started at her words.

"You don't mean escaped? Our *bash-komijtaji* escaped? Why, Selim burned him up. The soldiers—that was an accident. The walls caved in. Yes, I shall have it all written down and reported to the Sultan."

Mihirmah laughed. "And how Selim fought his way back alone through bands of rebels. You can see how he looks. Have his uniform sent with the note to show how torn his clothes are."

"You have talked enough, Mihirmah," Murad shouted. "I have said how it happened." Even Zayleh might have been subdued by the look in Murad's face. Mihirmah's heart beat a little faster, but her lips still curled.

"And what Allah says is true——" she laughed softly.

"*Sst*, you barking, yelping, unasked gift-wife," Murad choked. "Not one other sound out of you! By my sword,—a woman!" He sputtered helplessly.

Mihirmah moved quietly toward the door. She meant to leave without saying anything further, but at the last step, she hesitated, turned,

and fixed her dark, deep, half-closed eyes on Selim.

"Yes,—a woman," she echoed. "And what can a woman do,—Selim Bey?"

Alone in her own apartment the languor left her. She paced up and down, tingling, rebellious, exultant, despondent. Down there she had shown no concern, but Murad's furious assault had struck home. She was a cast-away gift—unwanted, tossed here in these Macedonian mountains.

She threw open a window to feel the cold air about her. A clamor from the market-place flooded the room. Mihirmah closed the window and clapped her hands for Aisha. She would go crazy in these closed, shutter-bound rooms; a trip through the market-place would at least provide a diversion.

The old woman crept into the room and waited, halting by the door.

"Get my street-clothes," Mihirmah ordered. "We shall go for a walk into the market."

Aisha ran forward and fell at her mistress' feet.

"Oh, my rose, my beautiful one," she cried, "what has my darling done? Your lord, Murad Pasha, has ordered it. You can not leave these rooms for seven whole days!"

CHAPTER XXXIX

WHOM ALLAH HELPS

ANOTHER week had dragged by, and once more it was market-day in Gorenó. The snow, which lay so heavily on the mountain-crests, had melted on the public square into watery slush, under the combined influence of a warm sun and the kneading of a hundred feet and hoofs. It ran in tiny wanton rivulets between the uneven paving stones into a dozen muddy pools, where stray dogs lapped and buffaloes, released from their carts, wallowed and grunted out their satisfaction in the sunshine.

Peasant women haggled with the townsfolk over the price of cheese and eggs and home-woven woolens and mattings; across the square their men-folk bartered sheep and cattle. Gypsies whined out the merits of their basketry and kitchen pottery, and in and out among the crowd a greasy Greek vendor of sweets and lemon-water pushed his gaily painted cart and wheedled for customers. Fezes and *kalpaks* mingled with the gay scarves of the peasant girls; heavy boots drowned the soft patter of buffalo-hide sandals;

dogs yelped; and tiny, half-clad urchins scrambled after the Goreno women, begging to carry their purchases home for half-a-*gologan*.

The crowd in Stoyan the Chandler's shop gossiped and selected purchases with unruffled deliberation; foot-room was scarce at Abraham the Jew's; here one heard only of bartering, farming, herding. But in the little inn opposite the blue-plastered mosque and the Turkish cemetery, discussion occasionally took a different turn. A boiling hot cup of Balkan coffee or a biting glass of *raki* loosened one's wit, and veiled language of innocent sound exchanged between friends did service for the franker discussions of more favored countries.

The muezzin's cry was still ringing over the market-place: "God is most great. Come to prayer! There is no God but Allah," when Selim Bey left the konak with his new private aide Mustafa, and strolled toward the mosque. Selim was not given to prayer, but Fate had played so many strange tricks with him of late that he had resolved by unusual devotion to increase his favor with both Allah and Goreno Turkdom.

Such a cloak of profound meditation enveloped him, as he crossed the market-place, that the crowding, jostling traders parted briskly before him. Only one luckless peasant, not noticing the Bey's advance, elbowed his way on through the crowd and bumped against the sudden devotee.

Selim stumbled, caught himself, and hurled a volley of oaths at the ill-starred peasant. The man sprang back and apologized in a flabby-voweled dialect rarely heard in Goreno. He was obviously a stranger, a charcoalman, he said, and he had come down to Goreno to buy a donkey. His accursed eyes had not noticed the most honored Bey. Selim spat at him; Mustafa kicked him for good measure; and the Bey pushed on up the mosque steps. But Mustafa lingered awhile, and his eyes still followed the mountaineer, who was not at all directing his attention to donkeys.

"Selim Bey," Mustafa called his master back, "that rascal has not gone to the donkey sale. He is over by the inn. I believe he is looking for some one."

Selim Bey wheeled and watched the peasant a long minute without speaking. The charcoal man was talking in a low voice with Croom Dobreff and Gani the Driver, who sipped their coffee in front of the inn. Croom motioned toward the highway that led up across the river to the mountains beyond. The man glanced about, then walked quickly away.

"Come to prayers," came the last call. "Allah only can help us. There is no God but Allah."

"Down Jabeshka alley," Selim whispered excitedly. "Crawl under the board bridge over by Frog Hollow and we can catch him at the turn this side of the Ladna Bridge."

"The deserted blacksmith shop under the bank," he whispered as they dodged through the cemetery and into the crooked, dirty alley, running with slush and mud and garbage.

"There is no God but Allah!" the devotees in the mosque chanted, and the monotonous drone of the Imâm mingled faintly, dreamily, with the hub-bub outside.

The stranger swung sturdily along the street, watchful but unsuspicious. The houses grew smaller and farther-between, until only a few sheds straggled along the highway. The road was high, to meet the level of the bridge, but on either side the lots sloped down into rush-filled, swampy fields. No one was on the road, the peasants were not yet returning from market, and the few inhabitants of the neighborhood were at work.

The mountaineer turned the bend of the road: the bridge lay just before him.

"Stop!" Selim stepped from a shed in the road that had once served as a wayside blacksmith-shop, and stood directly in front of the stranger. Mustafa grabbed his arms from behind and tied them fast.

"Gag him, Mustafa!"

The *zaptieh* had already done it. The peasant was taken too completely by surprise to make even a sign of resistance. He followed supinely as the aide yanked him into the shop and shoved him toward the rickety stairs that led into a damp

cellar littered with bits of board, old iron, and heaps of trash. Selim followed and shut the trap-door behind him.

The cellar was a small, square hole, the size of the smithy that covered it, with packed clay walls and floor, and was evidently used as a store-room for all sorts of odds and ends, useless but too good to throw away. It had one tiny slit of a window on the side away from the road-bank: now at high-noon it allowed a cobwebby slanting breadth of sunshine to stream across the cellar and send a dusty gleam over the trash-heaps and into the dark corners.

Selim and Mustafa went straight to their work: a very little search of the peasant's jacket-lining brought out a note, hand-printed in good Bulgarian:

"To the Nimrod of Macedon—From the Mount of Tribulation. Greetings! He That Prepareth The Way will gurgle over a cup of coffee in Stanko's Inn above the Komari Bog on Monday afternoon next, to meet you with tidings from the Great on High."

"Of a priest's cassock and a flowing beard
Nor Turk nor Moslem ever is afeared."

"Ah!" Selim grunted in satisfaction. The meaning was clear enough. The Goreno district could hold only one He That Prepareth The Way; the disguise, the most obvious one for the *bash-komitaji*. Fate had thrown good fortune

in Selim's way once more, and this time he would make no false moves.

The arrangements for the rendezvous were precision itself: Stanko's Inn above the Komari Bog. Selim knew Stanko's Inn very well indeed, and he knew the innkeeper. It would be the easiest thing in the world to tell Murad Pasha that the *bash-komitaji* was in the district, have Stanko's Inn surrounded on Monday afternoon, and the rebel captured. But Selim had suffered too severely at the hand of Fate during the past couple of weeks to feel any desire for sharing certain glory. He must capture Boyan, and capture him single-handed,—at least with no more assistance than Mustafa's.

He thought also of lying in wait nearby and capturing this elusive rebel as he came to the inn; it would save any interference from possible guests. But to meet the monk alone on a mountain road: Murad's eldest remembered the frame of his man; he guessed well that the *bash-komitaji* would not be unarmed, nor dreaming.

As he thought the matter over, Selim became convinced that the wisest way to accomplish all the ends he desired was to let the *bash-komitaji* see his way clear to the inn above the Komari Bog and get tangled there in the meshes of his net. Perhaps, the Moslem smiled shrewdly, perhaps he could come back to Goreno with two rebels in chains! The governorship of Uskub seemed once more very near.

Who was this Nimrod of Macedon? He must get his letter promptly and unsuspectingly; but Mustafa could be trusted to attend to that matter. Selim turned to the peasant. For fifteen tormenting minutes the man was stubbornly silent. Arguments, threats, and blows alike he treated with stolid contempt. But Selim was past master in the art of exquisite torture, and by the time the third beech-splinter had been hammered under the finger-nails of the captive's left hand, his right hand had traced upon a blood-stained scrap of paper the name of Ivan the Huntsman, at the Seven Well-springs.

"*Umph!*" Selim grunted. "I might have guessed it." He copied the note and resealed it carefully. "You'll see that it gets there, Mustafa," he ordered, handing it over. Then he turned to the mountaineer.

"Some Christian curs have given wrong names," he hissed at him. "But after the beech-splinter I always try the hot olive-oil, and there is quicksilver a-plenty to dance up and down your ear-drums, and burning charcoal to make your soles sizzle. In this cellar you rot until I come back; and, if I find that you have been lying to me, *giaur*, you'll learn to know some things that your mother never taught you!"

Selim Bey turned to the stairs. "Is the road still clear, Mustafa?" he asked as he climbed up.

CHAPTER XL

MESHES OF THE NET

THE Ladna River, cutting through Gorenno and reaching the valley to the south, changes from a rushing mountain stream full of rapids to a sluggish river spreading over a broad, shallow bed, half-dammed by the next chain of mountains to the southeast. The small, flat valley thus watered is a rich rice-growing region, but also one abounding in swamps and treacherous morasses.

The road eastward winds down through the flattest portion of the valley and between these marshes, until it passes the Komari Bog, dankest and deepest of all, a breeding-ground for snakes, lizards, and mosquitoes. Komari Bog had never been known to be dry, and all through the hot summer malaria-laden crowds of mosquitoes and flies swarmed out on the road and over to the west bank of the valley to feed on Gorenno blood. Once past this pest-hole, the road turns sharply to the north, then zig-zags in a steep ascent up the mountain-slope and through the Tessny Pass, which leads into the

valley of the Mesta, and so down to the Ægean.

Stanko's Inn lay just at the last turn of the road before one rode out on the flat shelf which led across the hills, and at the junction of half-a-dozen donkey-trails, which ended at the smoking charcoal-hills that dotted the uplands and glowed at night like a hundred monstrous slumbering fire-flies. Stanko's Inn had never been considered a dangerous place for insurgents. Its patrons were mostly the charcoal-men, whose wits were as charred and sooty as their faces. Whatever of alertness they had possessed in boyhood was completely buried beneath the common smoke and gloom of their coaling pines, and all graduated alike from tanned youth to tawny manhood and finished in the midnight ebony that marked the neck of the charcoal patriarch.

Every night they gathered around the little *khan* to deposit their loads in the sheds and to stable their donkeys before going down to their own homes at the outermost edge of Goreno, and Stanko eked out a subsistence from the care of the donkeys, the frugal cup of coffee the charcoalmen's means could afford, and the infrequent visit of a traveler en route for the west by way of Goreno.

A foggy, glum, sullen day was Monday. The city-merchant, wrapped in furs, with a shawl around his ears, nodded sociably to the occasional peasant he met pacing along the muddy

road. Taking a gulp occasionally from the bottle he carried, he cursed the weather by all the saints in the Greek calendar, and every now and then slowed his horse to a walk and chatted with some of the more intelligent-looking. The unsuspecting way in which the peasants answered his inquiries about Goreno and the charcoal trade assured Selim Bey of the success of his disguise. Mustafa, also on horseback, played irreproachably his rôle of *zaptieh* body-guard and servant.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon when the two men rode in front of the donkey-stables and Selim Bey dismounted.

"Now, Mustafa," he turned to the *zaptieh*, "here is your chance. If we catch that rascal, you'll be an *iuzbashi* [centurion] in a week, with enough gold jingling in your pockets to make anybody dance to your music. Four elbow-lengths tall, Mustafa, and as for girth neither a grasshopper nor a hog. Black eyes and thick black hair: it is a pity neither of us saw him at the trial, and I was too much occupied on the way to Uskub to examine him closely. But keep your eyes open for a priest's cassock and a flowing beard—those are his own words, Mustafa:

‘Of a priest's cassock and a flowing beard
Nor Turk nor Moslem ever is afeared.’

I'll be on the lookout for him in the inn. You

care for the horses, like a real *zaptieh*-servant, and watch everyone who comes along the road."

Then, turning to the café-barber-shop in Stanko's courtyard, he yelled at the *zaptieh* in regular city-merchant style:

"Don't you let my horse starve either, do you hear? Give him plenty of oats, and have him ready to start on in a couple of hours. I must be over the divide by sundown. Come across to the inn by and by; I may need you. Wake up, you flat-footed zany! Why are you staring at me like an ox at a painted door?"

Stanko's was not a pretentious café, even for a road-side inn. A squarish box of brick and pine boards in front of the inn proper, it reminded one of a gateman's lodge before a Salonica palace. One side was given over to Stanko's coffee-place and bar-counter combined, and behind it was a door connecting with a sleeping-room for the innkeeper and his help. The corner on the other side of Stanko's bar was occupied by the barber-shop end of the establishment. An old arm-chair, with the back sawed off and hinged to the seat, the top part attached to a rope, which could be regulated by a pulley nailed to the wall, served just as well as a Salonica leather-covered, hydraulic-power contraption; and, if the mirror was fly-specked, the razor at least was never dull, and there was always lather enough on hand to shave a grizzly

Some sentimental chromos of French or Ital-

ian descent, pasted on the walls, lent color to the whitewashed interior, and in one corner an icon of Saint George killing the Dragon added the finishing touch of art. Cigarette-box etiquettes were glued in rows over the smoking divan, and on the low tabourets in front were earthen ash-trays, boxes of matches, and empty *raki*-bottles. A brazier piled high with charcoal glowed in the center of the café, a welcome sight on such an afternoon.

Stanko, the innkeeper, was tending his coffee-pot by the fire, and greeted the fur-clad city-merchant with the typical village *cafeji's* bow.

"Saint Demeter bless your liver this afternoon, traveler; may you stay here long and like it!"

"Your country is colder than ice to-day," Selim grumbled by way of response. "Get me a hot *raki* and some sour pickles to top it off; I am three-quarters frozen."

"Stanko keeps no traveler waiting; so help me Saint Petka, you shall have it all in a twink!" and the innkeeper stepped down through the trap-door to where he kept his liquors.

Selim had never been a Mohammedan teetotaler, and to-day, nervous with excitement, his craving was irrepressible. Besides, he reasoned, a little brandy would only make him alert and snappy in his movements. Selim Bey intended to enjoy his triumph to the full, so when Stanko returned from the cellar, the Bey almost

forgot for a moment the object of his journey up the mountain.

Having shaken himself up a little bit, the Moslem looked about the place. A younker, evidently Stanko's apprentice in the tonsorial art, was lathering some one's face; but apparently dozing on the divan, his face turned toward the window, lay a priest in a cassock. The beard was flowing enough. At the sound of Selim's voice, the priest sleepily turned toward him and half-opened his eyes, then rolled back and dropped into a doze again.

CHAPTER XLI

HE THAT PREPARETH THE WAY

NOT in Selim's most optimistic dreams had it occurred to him that he would stumble upon the *bash-komitaji* napping the moment he entered Stanko's precincts. To be sure, he could not see the man's face clearly, for the hood he had thrown over his priest's cap covered his eyes, but this circumstance only convinced Selim Bey that he had his man at last.

Now, whatever claim Selim himself might lay to membership in the category of idiots, he was well aware that the monk-leader was no fool. That a man who must guess himself to be fiercely hounded should be reckless enough to indulge in the luxury of a public nap was hard to explain on any other supposition than, perhaps, complete physical and mental exhaustion. But, *was he really asleep?* For the one hasty glance the dozing priest had given him before resuming his slumbers was far too keen and intelligent for a man just disturbed in his nap.

The entire situation flashed on Selim. The rebel was on the watch for his man from Go-

reno, and was simulating sleepiness in order to avoid unnecessary and undesirable conversation with other parties. Evidently he believed that no one would expect to find him in monk's garb in any place, and that no one would be looking for him at all in Stanko's inn.

"You ubiquitous rascal!" Selim thought. "If you only knew that your messenger is starving in that cellar this minute, and that a copy of your letter to 'Nimrod' is in my pocket!" He sat down on the divan next to the priestly-clad figure and, absorbing Stanko's intoxicants to thaw his blood, beat his brains to hatch out some scheme of making sure of the *komitaji*.

Selim Bey had come to Stanko's in the guise of an icon-dealer. The choice of this particular form of disguise had suggested itself by the disguise dictated in the leader's letter to Ivan, for it seemed to him that an icon-dealer had natural claims on the attention of a man in cassock. And once he could get at his man without exciting suspicion, he could trust his revolver and the steel grip of Mustafa's paw. A plan was slowly assuming shape in his mind—a plan that appealed to Selim's sense of humor, besides being safe and effective.

He asked Stanko to move the brazier to the corner of the room nearer the barber-shop, where he could look into the street, and seating himself *à la Turque* on a cushion in front of it, went on sipping at his brandy and looking out of the low,

grimy window. Then his eyes turned to the "Saint George killing the Dragon," which beautified the corner diagonally opposite.

"Innkeeper," he asked, "who is that half-naked bully that's trying to tickle a lizard with his goad in your picture over there?"

"Half-naked bully tickling a lizard! Good Lord deliver us poor sinners!" Stanko began crossing himself piously. "Be you a Protestant or an unbeliever, traveler, that you don't recognize Saint George and the Dragon? Saint George of all saints, sir! And this icon painted by the best icon-painter Goreno ever had,—Dobry Vladimiroff, sir, who died an awful death, the blessed Virgin give peace to his ashes!"

"Oh, it is one of his Saint Georges, is it? No wonder I couldn't recognize him. Still, innkeeper, I meant no harm by my question; my eyes are giving out, and I just couldn't tell what the picture stood for. The Saint Georges I sell, to be sure, are a different matter. You can tell my Saint George at a hundred paces."

"So 'tis an icon-peddler you be, traveler?" Stanko inquired.

"An icon-merchant, right you have it. My brother is the Archdeacon of the Saint Panteleimon monastery in the holy 'Athos; his monks paint the icons between midnight and sunrise, and every blessed one is blessed with holy water from the fountain of Saint Panteleimon under the altar. I sell them, but only to good Chris-

tians, to priests and deacons and pious innkeepers, as I may chance to find one in a week's journeying. Our icons are sanctified, and if an unbeliever or a rascal touches them, woe betide the house where the holy icon has been thus insulted! Why, innkeeper, my Saint Georges are almost alive, and the Dragon spits real fire! If you touched him during Lent with greasy hands, it would burn your fingers!"

"Saint Petka and holy Saint Calliope have mercy on our souls and deliver us from fires everlasting!" Stanko was a pious idiot and manifested in his exclamations a wide acquaintance with the celestial community.

"You are a good Christian, innkeeper? Stanko is your name?"

"Stanko is my name, traveler."

"Well, here comes my *zaptieh*-servant. Now then, you Armenian tortoise," he shouted through the window, "where have you been lolling all this while? Didn't I tell you that there was a pious innkeeper here that wanted one of our real live Saint Georges with the fire-spitting Dragons? Bring a couple of them over here, and have him choose the one he likes best!"

The reclining figure in the cassock hardly stirred during this speech of Selim's.

"Yes, Stanko," the Bey continued, "if you wish to find out whether a man is cheating you, just get him to touch the dragon's tongue with his third finger, and watch it blister. My icons

never lie. Fact is, I can't sell you any, no matter how much money you may offer for it, until you have touched the dragon yourself while chanting the '*Gospody pomiluy*' of the holy liturgy. If it doesn't burn you, you may have it free for nothing and without cost."

"What! The Saint George icon?"

"Why, yes, provided you do your share in an experiment I am going to try."

The door opened, and Mustafa walked in noisily, with a package bulging from under his coat. Selim noticed the napping priest suddenly turn around and shoot a glance at the new-comer and then continue his snoring. Stanko grinned at Selim Bey and nodded toward the dozing figure:

"A priest's son is the devil's grandson nowadays, traveler. God alone knows where he has been last night. Said he came from Gorenko, where he had been visiting some sick parishioners, and that now he was going on a pilgrimage to the Great on High! Well, I don't know about that—and far be it from me, merchant, to speak ill of a priest in cassock, the Virgin Mary bless my sinful heart!"

"Well, that's what I was coming to, Stanko," the Bey continued. He relieved the servant of his package and beckoned to the innkeeper to sit down. Selim Bey moved his cushion nearer the old man and began whispering in his ear:

"Here is what I think, Stanko. When I was

at Saint Panteleimon's last time, my brother, Archdeacon Jeremiah, told me: 'Look out wherever you go, Brother; the Evil One is abroad.' 'The Evil One?' says I. 'Yes,' he answers, 'the very Satan himself. The Lord has given him leave to travel all over Macedonia in the garb of a priest and see whomsoever he can snare. The Lord wishes to find out how many of his servants can tell each other from the Devil. Pretty hard thing to do with some of them, Brother!' That's what my brother the Archdeacon told me."

"By Saint Onuphry and by Saint Sophronyl And have you seen him anywhere in your travels?" Stanko was crossing himself and mumbling the "*Gospody pomiluy*,"—God have mercy on us.

"*Shhh!*" Selim cautioned. "Not so loud! I asked my brother the Archdeacon: 'And how can I recognize him? Shall I try my Dragon on him and blister his fingers?' 'By no means,' says he, 'the Saint Georges are no good except for mortal men.' But I had a dream last night, and my brother the Archdeacon said, 'I saw the Holy Parchment of Saint Panteleimon curl up on the thirty-third page. I opened the book first thing after liturgy, and this is what I read: "By his beard shalt thou know him, the Evil One that keepeth awake in the night and sleepeth in the daytime with the owl. By his beard and his cassock shalt thou know him. Thou shalt

bind his feet and his hands, and his eyes shalt thou put to confusion. For a sleeping servant is unto the Lord an abomination." Whatever that means, Brother,' my brother the Archdeacon says, 'whatever that means, I have not pondered yet.'

"Well, Stanko," Selim continued, "you feel where the wind is blowing? I have been watching him over there on the smoking-divan, and if he doesn't answer the Holy Book of Saint Panteleimon to an iota! Now, innkeeper, as you are a Christian and an honest man, help me capture the Devil, and the St. George is yours for nothing."

"Holy St. Martyr Polyeucte! Traveler, excuse me, I must go and fix up some things in the inn."

"If you don't, Stanko," the Bey ignored his remark,—“if you don't help, your inn will be accursed from this day forth and forevermore; for the Devil damns everything that he lays his head upon."

"Good St. Ignace Bogonos and St. Gregory Bogoslov have mercy on our souls!" Stanko prayed. "What do you want me to do, kind brother of the Archdeacon?"

"Talk aloud about something else, and get me some strong hempen rope and a dish of red pepper. Then, when I try to bind him, you just throw the red pepper in his eyes, and my *zaptieh* will give him all he wants in the way of pummel-

ing. And listen, innkeeper,"—Selim spoke aloud for effect,—“get me some cucumber pickles while you are about it.”

“In a second, traveler. Saint Ilarion preserve us!” Stanko answered.

A raucous voice from the barber chair scolded at the apprentice:

“Steady, you green-haired little monkey, steady! What do you think you are about—plucking a rooster or sheep-shearing? Just dare scratch me, and I’ll skin your hide for you!” And then, as Stanko returned, “Innkeeper, you’ve got to do it yourself! I am not going to let this puppy scratch at my face another minute!”

“There, there, customer,” the hostler humored him, “he is doing his best. I can’t shave you myself, because my right thumb is sore.—Gosho, you good-for-nothing rascal, don’t you dare scratch the customer, or I’ll pack you off to your father again!”

Selim looked up in surprise: he had not noticed this stranger before, and he felt bothered to find anyone else in the inn. But the man looked harmless enough, if a little splenetic. He was well dressed, in fact just a little dandified in appearance, and to judge from the attention he was bestowing on his lathered face, something of a fop. Scarcely a man to care mixing in a fight, Selim concluded, and turned his eyes again toward the napping priest, who was beginning to get restless.

It was a mere matter of overpowering him; that was easy enough, with Mustafa on hand. But Selim Bey wished to capture his man and get away without any one being the wiser. He had learned already that it was better to move in the dark, and his very expedition to the inn on such an important mission, alone, without Murad's knowledge, could be excused only by a spectacular return that same night.

Moreover Murad's son did not know the political leanings of his superstitious innkeeper, or, for that matter, of the city-man in the chair. It was safer to make an ally of Stanko in a holy fight against the Devil than risk having him as an enemy in a plot to catch Him That Prepareth the Way. Once he had his man tied and helpless, he could afford to assert his authority.

Stanko brought in the rope and pepper, casting a fearful glance at the "Devil," and, before the napping man in cassock had had a chance to realize what was happening, one quick blow on the part of Mustafa had pinned him to the divan. While the innkeeper dashed a handful of red pepper into his face, Selim Bey bound him hand and foot with the long rope. At the cry of the prisoner, the city man in the chair made a sudden jerk, and the apprentice almost slashed off his ear. Gosho had overheard some of his master's conversation with the icon-dealer, too, which partly accounted for his nervousness. The lad had all the superstition of the mountain-born.

The city-man did not interfere. It would have done no good, anyway: he was alone against a lot of religious fanatics. Or did he have reasons of his own for not caring to mix in? In Macedonia people often have reasons for minding their own business.

"Now hurry up!" he snapped at the apprentice. "Do you think I am going to camp in this chair? 'Tend to your shaving!"

"*Na zdravie*, sir, good luck to you!" murmured Goshö the apprentice as he wiped his customer's neck with a hot towel. "I don't mean any harm, sir, but one does get nervous sometimes."

The city-man tossed a piaster on the chair and turned toward the other side of the room.

It was a spectacle. The man in cassock was on the floor, sneezing and cursing in his impotence. The three men laughed derisively at him. But young Goshö looked from a distance: the Devil had terrors for his superstitious heart even when a captive.

"The Lord is too high and the Sultan is too far, they say," the innkeeper sagely reflected. "But who'd have thought, icon-dealer, that I was born to see the very Devil himself napping in my own café?"

"Such is life, Stanko," Selim answered. "'Of a priest's cassock and a Devil's beard, what icon-dealer ever is afeared?'—if he has a brother like my brother the Archdeacon?"

"How long till sunset, innkeeper?" the city-man inquired.

Stanko stepped to the window and consulted the sky. "Four hours, traveler."

"You are going somewhere, sir?" Selim Bey queried, anxious to have as few people as possible around while he examined his prisoner's pockets.

"Yes, I must be in Goreno by sundown." The city-man's voice was very raucous.

"Let me go, I tell you, madman!" the man in cassock was protesting. "What in God's name do you take me for?"

"In God's name we take you for the Devil," Selim explained derisively. "But in my own name I take you for a wandering dreamer from the Mount of Tribulation, for a rascal having dealings with the 'Great on High.' Do you ever remember your love-letters, He-That-Prepareth-the-Way?"

"Oh-ho! That's who I am, eh?" he looked at his captor in amazement. Then the shaved man's eye caught his, and the prisoner grasped the unspoken message.

"So that's who I am!" the "Nimrod of Macedon" repeated.

"So that's who you are!" retorted the Bey, "and this is what you carry!" He pulled out of an inside pocket from under the victim's shirt a bundle of papers and some sealing-wax.

"Don't look at these papers, innkeeper," Selim

cautioned; "they'll give you bad dreams! You are going to Goreno soon, friend?" he turned to the city-man, who was apparently hesitating near the doorway.

"Yes, must be going presently," the traveler answered. "Abraham Effendi is waiting for me in Goreno to close a deal in rice."

Selim Bey offered the rice-merchant a glass of *raki*. The latter merely touched it with his lips.

"You are also going back this evening."

There was no question in his voice, but Selim Bey answered.

"Yes, as soon as I have made heads or tails of this devilish scribble in his papers."

The merchant smiled. "So you really think you have the Devil there?"

"Gosho, go and get me another flask of *raki*!" Selim ordered the apprentice.

Stanko had gone to the inn proper to look after the wants of a peasant who planned to stay overnight. "The Devil he is for these cattle," he explained, "but, my name being Selim Bey of Goreno, you can guess what sort of a devil this man must be. It was worth some original intrigue to capture him. It will be a sensation in the *konak* to-morrow morning when Selim Bey Effendi kicks the iron gates open and walks in with the trophy—what?"

"It will be a sensation, yes. Well, good road to you, Bey Effendi; Allah take care of you, and the Devil will look after your baggage!"

CHAPTER XLII

THE KOMARI BOG

SELIM was losing patience. "For the third time: Did you see your 'Nimrod' or didn't you?" But the prisoner did not look up. "I could open that clam-shell mouth of yours on short notice, but when I do I want to be your whole audience. Hardly any one has been here to-day, but who knows what a rabble of charcoal devils will be around by sundown!"

Slowly the minutes passed as the Bey was struggling with the meaningless jargon of his victim's papers. He turned to his *zaptieh* and said in a low voice:

"What do you think, Mustafa? I'd rather be through with the farce and have this thing tied to the post next that low peasant in our cellar. That idiotic innkeeper may catch on to our game, and I don't know his persuasion on matters political. Besides—that rich merchant; we should have held on to him. I was foolish to blab so much. I want to try my monkey-wrench argument with this Devil and see whether it will

loosen his jaw. Ho, you little one, we are going!" he shouted at the apprentice.

Gosho loaded up with a dozen bottles of cognac and *raki*, and the Bey and Mustafa dragged out the man in cassock.

"I wonder whether that hunter from the Pirin is coming here after all. I'll wager he didn't get his letter; what do you think, Mustafa?"

"He did get it, don't you worry." It was almost the first time the prisoner had spoken.

"You fool, answer my questions when you're the one asked!" and Selim's boot dug into his prisoner's stomach. They were just outside the gate when the innkeeper appeared from the other side of the courtyard.

"Hola, Stanko, can you guess what I am going to do with him? Take him straight back to Gorenno and have him branded as the Devil in public, then send an account of it all to the Exarch in Constantinople. They'll make me an archdeacon for it, and maybe an abbot. If they do, I'll take you over to my monastery to look after the winery—what?"

"But the Saint Georges?" Stanko inquired.

"I didn't want to open the package in the Devil's presence, but you'll find them there on the divan. They'll pay for your *raki* and pickles."

"Saint Chrisanthe preserve you, and Saint Theophan multiply your children! *Na dobur put*—good road to you!"

"*Zbogom!*" the Bey replied in peasant fashion, and Stanko entered the café. The others turned toward the livery stable.

"Where is your horse, Bey Effendi?" Mustafa noticed the empty stall the moment he entered the stable. A folded piece of paper was nailed on the stall-bar. Selim snatched it, and the same hand-printed sort of message in Bulgarian greeted his eyes:

"To the Devil in Stanko's Inn, Care of Archdeacon Ananias's Brother. From the Mount of Tribulation—Greeting! He That Prepareth the Way sent you a message last Saturday by a man who never returned. It was a wise whim of mine to change my disguise; I knew you without being recognized myself. But the little fool that shaved me took too long a time to it, else the Bey would have found us together. That brat's slow bungling caused your capture. But fear not, my Nimrod. You are worth nothing to the 'icon-dealer' and Selim Bey will not have Murad Pasha laugh at his new story. It is not cowardice that makes me desert you; I am too much needed now. Keep your mouth locked; and may your papers be never deciphered by Selim and his like. I leave you in your captor's pocket, but nobody wants you; you are useless baggage and that's your safety. I have bartered my two-mule carriage for the Effendi's horse. A fine animal. It will carry me where Selim can't even sniff me.

"'Of a rice-merchant with a shaven beard,
Nor Turk nor Moslem ever is afear'd!'"

Selim Bey re-read the message, nonplussed, but only for a moment. Then he stuck the letter in front of the captive's nose.

"Read it, you crafty fox! Read this, and see

if you haven't found your match! Who'd ever have thought that rice-merchant was your man! Oh, no, you are not the *bash-komitaji*; you are just plain Nimrod of Macedon! That is, if I am idiot enough to believe what the real Nimrod has written on this rag of paper! But you won't eel out this time by any such trickery. When I hang you upside down in my cellar, you'll tell me a different story."

Ivan the Huntsman did not reply. His surprise at Boyan's daring letter was second only to his amazement at the Turk's wrong interpretation of it. Of one thing he felt sure—Boyan, and hence the money, was still safe.

"Nimrod's" spirits rose, and the efficient way in which he met Selim's threats made the latter waver a little. Who could tell but that the letter in his hands was actually penned by the real *bash-komitaji*? Selim had never seen the famous Huntsman at close range; was he going to play the fool again and get the wrong man, as he had done ten days before at the cave? He wished he had not drunk so much. Which one was the real bird? If the thief of his horse were the leader, he had gone to Poliany, the nearest insurgent center outside of Gorenno where assistance might be obtained. Selim knew of Macedonian trickeries too well to take much stock in the final way in which the writer of the letter consigned the prisoner of Stanko's inn to the kindness of Destiny.

Even in case his first interpretation of the

message was the correct one, however, still the Huntsman of the Pirins would have all the better reason for rousing up a relief party in Poliany to save the captured *komitaji*. If only the *iuz-bashi* [centurion] there could somehow be stirred into action! Selim Bey wished his rebellious baggage were safely caged in the blacksmith cellar. It was fast thinking, and the conclusion reached was a bold one.

"Mustafa," Selim ordered the *zaptieh*, "mount your horse and gallop the life out of him straight to Poliany! Rouse the commander to turn the whole country downside-up and capture that rice-merchant. I shall drive directly to Goreno with this baggage and wait for you and your news in our jail-cellar. Off with you, Mustafa. Think of the stakes, and don't lose a minute!"

But hardly had Mustafa vanished up the road leading to the little village of Poliany, where a Turkish garrison guarded the eastern pass across the Pirins, when Selim Bey realized the complexity of his situation. Inside of two minutes he discovered the immediate reason for the rice-merchant's making away with his horse. One of the two mules that was to draw him and his prisoner to Goreno was lame and would not budge an inch.

The afternoon was growing gloomier every minute; a thick, pulpy fog was settling all about. Mud-bespattered peasants with their charcoal-

laden donkeys kept passing in and out of the sheds, and hurrying on down to their huts in the valley. A couple of them stopped for a moment or two in front of the stable, and stared curiously at the puzzled Bey and his prisoner. In a flash the Turk had reached a decision. He jumped at one of the peasants whose donkey looked the sturdier:

"Here, you, come with me!"

He dumped the charcoal load on the ground and mated the peasant's donkey with the rice-merchant's mule to tug the rickety carriage. The charcoal-peddler needed only to look from the barrel of Selim's long revolver to the bound figure of the man in cassock right inside the door, to lose any idea of opposition which may have at first suggested itself to his peasant brain. Without a word, he climbed to the driver's seat and picked up the reins.

The Turk lined his conveyance with Stanko's bottles; and then a Mohammedan fancy suggested a move characteristic of Selim's eternal failing for the humorous.

"Here, you priest, listen to me! Wasn't there a bishop once that rode into Jerusalem on the back of an ass?" There was in his voice the scornful note of pretended ignorance.

The Huntsman did not look up.

"You don't answer, cur? You, charcoal dirt, can't you talk either?"

"Once I heard the priest chant about some-

thing of that sort, Effendi," the peasant ventured.

"Well, then, this time we'll have the Devil himself riding into Goreno on your donkey's back!" And together the charcoalman and the Bey piled the bulky frame of the prisoner on the animal's back, fastened on like a load of charcoal. Ivan the Huntsman protested loudly.

"I don't want to hear another croak from you until we enter my cellar! Shut up!" and Selim pulled a dirty, greasy rag from inside the stable and gagged his victim.

"Now off with you as fast as you can drive, right straight to Goreno!" he yelled to the charcoalman. "I'll hold this revolver pointed at your neck, so don't you dare play any dirty games on me!"

The peasant's donkey announced the departure of the improvised train in shrill, plaintive braying.

"So you are a charcoal peddler, eh?" The team was beginning the descent.

"My face would give me the lie if I said nay, Effendi!" The peasant spoke in the soft-vowelled dialect of the uplander, which Selim understood but did not speak.

A tawny charcoalman he was: his sooty, smoky face, plastered with the carbon dirt of a hundred charred pine-trees, bore but a distant resemblance to a human countenance. A black, greasy sheep-skin *kalpak* covered the major part of his cra-

nium. Sunken beneath his singed eyebrows, a pair of glassy orbs blinked with the colorless stupidity which only five centuries of thralldom can stamp upon the physiognomy of a race. He was taciturn, and conversed readily only with his donkey.

The rickety patter of the carriage disposed Selim Bey for the taste of Stanko's cognacs and *raki*. Bottle after bottle of cognac dropped by the roadside.

The last bottle would have followed its predecessors, but the revolver slipped by the roadside instead, without the Turk's being any the wiser. *Raki* and cognac proved a stupefying combination. Selim could think of nothing but Goreno, and his tongue rattled continually:

"Listen here, look, how is it now, how is it—far to Goreno? Is it far to Goreno—Goreno, look you, or I'll blow your brains out for you!—I'll—I'll——" and the Bey brandished the empty bottle. The charcoalman noted the weapon, whistled, and answered in a drawl:

"Three turns, a down-you-go, an easy climb, and there you be, Effendi!"

Twilight fell over the Ladna valley, and in less than an hour the evening fog was so thick that the driver could see hardly more of the Bey than a pair of alcohol-glowing eyeballs. The turnpike was deserted and the Turk was drunk.

"Get up there! Get *up*! Just a little while longer, brother!" the charcoalman yelled to his

donkey, and before Selim could notice where he was, the carriage had turned to the left of the Goreno road and was creaking down a lane across muddy pastures and rice-fields and into the bog-marshes of the Ladna River. The mismated team had some trouble in pulling the carriage in concord. A mudhole that almost upset the carriage roused the drunken Turk, and he yelled at the driver:

"Hey, there, you, I'll blow out your brains, I'll! How it is, is it—far to Goreno?"

"One more turn, then down-you-go, and there you'll lie, Effendi."

The Moslem grunted and relapsed into taciturnity.

"Cheer up, my donkey, cheer up, my brother!" the driver called to his donkey. Except for an occasional nasal grunt, the gagged Huntsman on the donkey's back called no attention to his location. Pretty soon the loose-jointed carriage began pattering down a rather steep incline. Through the fog the brandy-dimmed orbs of Selim Bey saw a flash of water some hundred elbow-lengths below.

"Look out there!" he yelled. "Down there, you, I'll blow out your brains! See how it flickers. What's that—hidden-treasure lights?"

"Hidden frogs' eyes!" the driver laughed back. "That's the down-you-go I was talking about."

"It didn't shine that way to me this morning

when I came from Goreno. Goreno—how—is it far to Goreno?”

“Don’t suppose it did. Get up, my donkey! Cheer up, my brother, we’re almost there!” and the peasant lashed the rice-merchant’s mule.

The charcoalman’s donkey did not seem to like his comrade’s company. As a result, the improvised team had no definite policy in their work.

“Get up, there!” bellowed the driver. *Splash*—*splash* went the team, and the carriage seemed to sink all of a sudden into a quicksand quagmire.

“Look out, you charcoal devil! Are you bogging me? I’ll blow out your brains for you!” and the intoxicated Moslem jammed the empty bottle against the peasant’s neck. “Is this Goreno—or Ladna River?”

“Both are pretty close, Effendi, but this is just a mud-pool. Haw there!”

For some little time the driver busied himself with the carriage wheels; hammering at one in particular; then he jumped to his seat again, lashed the mule savagely and let go.

The team plunged ahead and the carriage sailed into the fen. Then suddenly, without any warning whatever, something snapped. The left front wheel splashed into the marsh, the rig lost equilibrium, and the Turk yawped:

“Hey, you charcoal devil!”

“There we are, my donkey! Here we are, my brother!” the driver yelled, and there was a new ring in his voice. He jumped on to the car-

riage pole, cursing and shouting in turns, but not for very long. The peasant with the mud-be-spattered face and the colorless, blinking eyes had unharnessed the team, mounted the rice-merchant's mule, and was leading away his own donkey with the human baggage loaded on it before the inebriate could realize what was happening.

The carriage began filling up with clammy, creepy fen-mire that gripped Selim's feet in an icy clutch and shook him from his brandy-stupor. The Moslem leaped from his seat with an oath and aimed his empty whisky-bottle at the dark figures in the mist.

"Cool your head, Selim Bey! Cool your head and warm your feet!" The voice was a little way off to the left, and it was no longer a dialect that the charcoalman spoke, but pure Bulgarian, the Bulgarian of Selim's two messages. "You are half-an-hour's swim from dry-land, and another two hours' walking from a living soul after we are gone. It is freezing now, Effendi, but the Evil One doesn't bother folks in cold weather!"

"Hey there, you charcoalman! You'll grease the rope for this!"

"Don't slander the trade, Selim Bey. I am a revolutionist by training, a monk by faith, and a *bash-komitaji* by profession. But my brother-in-freedom is groaning on the donkey's back. A cold nightmare to you, Selim Bey, and may the charcoalmen bless me for ridding the land of another blood-sucker!"

And the two figures vanished into the fog.

The wheel-rims had sunk out of sight. The Turk stared wildly around. He could see nobody, hear nobody. Far away in the distance his eyes could catch the faintest glimmer of what he imagined was Goreno. All around him was that glassy, creepy, serpentine ice-glaze of the treacherous Komari Bog.

And the carriage slowly sank, sank.

CHAPTER XLIII

THOSE WHO PAY

AN hour before the heavy gates of the Gorenko *konak* swung open, a shivering figure on horseback rode up and down the public square, trying to keep warm and wear away the time. Intermittently he banged on the iron gates; but old Mohammed the porter was not one to be disturbed before opening time. Mustafa cursed the old man's dullness, sprang again on his horse, and rode furiously away. Ten minutes later he came back and banged again at the bolted entrance. Had he been anxious to rouse the entire *konak*, he might have succeeded in gaining admittance, but Mustafa wanted to see the Pasha of Gorenko and only the Pasha if possible.

Obedient to Selim's orders, Mustafa had galloped up to the little village of Poliany, situated on a small upland plain just outside the narrow defile that marked the highest point of the pass. Its nearness to the mountains and its important situation had made it a favorite rendezvous for brigands and rebels alike, until the Turkish government established a local garrison there. After

that the population dwindled away, and now Poliany, half an hour's ride from Stanko's inn, consisted of a Turkish garrison, some abandoned cottages, and little else.

Enver Effendi responded to Mustafa's alarm at once, and set the entire Poliany garrison to ransacking the village and the mountain-side in search of the rice-merchant. Mustafa joined in the chase for a while, but his interests lay in Goreno, and, helping himself to a fresh horse, he galloped back, hoping still to overtake Selim on his way to town.

But he met no one on the road, and it was late evening when he entered Goreno. Everything was as bolted and quiet as on any other night; the *konak* gates were barred and only the night-watchmen were abroad. If Selim Bey had entered Goreno at all, he had evidently done so very quietly; perhaps he had taken his captive directly to the cellar under the old blacksmith shop.

Mustafa shoved open the door and stopped; no sign nor light crept through the rough board floor. He lifted the trap-door with an uneasy misgiving in the back of his head, and crept down the stairs. In the flickering light of his match, he saw only the bound, gagged figure of the peasant, crouched in a wretched heap on the mud-floor. Mustafa fished a dark lantern from under the stairway, lighted it, and turned its glare on the peasant.

"Has Selim Bey or any one been here to-night?" he demanded. The peasant moaned but did not answer. Mustafa untied the bandage across his mouth and tossed it aside with impatience.

"Now squeal, you rat!" he snarled. "Who has been here this evening?"

"No one, Effendi," the man said, his voice husky and scarcely more than a whisper.

"No one?" Mustafa swore. "Allah curse your *giaur* spawn if I don't find my master!"

Forgetting the lantern, forgetting to re-gag the peasant, Mustafa stumbled up the stairs and mounted his horse.

The fog had lifted as night came on, and a white moon had risen, casting long, creepy tree-shadows across the road. Mustafa galloped out of the quiet town, past the crowding huts of the charcoal burners, and out along the marshes. He intended riding straight to Stanko's inn and tracing Selim Bey from there. Murad's eldest had chosen him for his private aide only a few days before, when the *zaptieh* returned from his investigation at Poosty, and before he had given any detailed report of his trip to the Pasha. Puffed with the responsibility and honor of his position, he was eager to serve his master.

He reined up so suddenly that the horse almost sat upon his haunches. Something lay beside the road gleaming in the moonlight. Mustafa swung from his saddle and picked it up; he turned it

over and over in his hand. There could be no mistake about it: Murad Pasha himself had presented that pistol to Selim Bey. The *zaptieh* drew the reins through his arm and walked on slowly. A hundred paces farther on he picked up an empty *raki* bottle, the bottom of it was still covered with fresh dregs.

Mustafa looked carefully at the middle of the road;—the soft mud showed donkey-tracks and the cloven hoof-prints of buffalo and oxen, but there was only one carriage trail. The aide turned about and followed it along the bog; at a short distance beyond the place where he had found the pistol, the zig-zaggy wheel-tracks turned squarely from the main road-bed into an abandoned trail across the morass. Mustafa tied his horse a short distance from the highway and went forward, picking his steps gingerly over the wafer-like coating of ice, and his ears on the alert for the least sound.

The creepy expanse of the fen in the cold white moonlight appalled him; Selim Bey must have been as drunk as a lunatic to allow himself to be carried here. Who had his driver been, anyway? Or had he had any? The Turk examined the hoof-prints, crystallized now in the soft mud. No mule ever made as small a track as the one on the left; it could only be a donkey's. Mustafa started running forward in his anxiety, lost his footing, and floundered over his boot-top in a mud-hole rut. The slipping, sliding hoof-

prints ahead told him how hardly the carriage had been yanked on.

Then all at once the wheel-tracks ceased. Before and around him glimmered the freezing phosphorescence of the Komari Bog, with dark tree-shadows writhing on its moonlit surface.

The *zaptieh* made a trumpet of his hands and sent a long wail over the waste:

"Selim Bey, Effendi!"

"Effendi," came back the echo of his call.

The bleak silence gripped at the *zaptieh's* throat, choked him. He felt his very heart curdling within him. He turned on his heel and scarcely breathed until he was back again by the road, untying his horse.

Old Stanko was snoring noisily when Mustafa pounded him out of bed and ordered him to tell him how Selim had left the inn. The cold touch of the revolver between his eyes did not serve to sharpen Stanko's wits, but in the midst of his pleas for mercy and prayers to all the calendared saints, the Moslem got his story. With a curse by way of explanation, he was again in his saddle, on a reckless gallop for the Goreno *konak*.

It was five o'clock in the morning when Mustafa's final banging brought the snail-foot Mohammed to the gate.

"Well now, what, Mustafa?" the old fellow began slowly. But Mustafa did not stop to answer.

The urgent message from his eldest son's aide

brought Murad into a small reception room in his dressing robe. Mustafa dropped on his knees before the father and jerked out his story in snatches of sentences. Murad listened to the very end in stolid silence; but when the *zaptieh* had finished, and had dared to murmur his opinion as to the probable end of the business, a heart-broken sob shook the old Pasha, and he pressed his face to the wall. Whatever else he was, Selim was his firstborn, and the only son that had grown to manhood. When he turned around, his face was livid, and his bloodshot eyes glared frenziedly from under his puffy lids. He clenched his fist and shook it tremblingly in the very face of a Fate that seemed at last to betray him.

"Goreno shall pay for this," he said in thick, guttural tones. "Goreno and all the Ladna district shall run blood as the Komari Bog runs water!"

Mustafa shrank against the wall, terrified at the old man's outburst of wrath; but Murad did not notice him. He stood still for a moment, then rushed out of the room.

Fatma, Mihirmah, and Zayleh were already at breakfast when Fatma's small slave girl came running in, her eyes bulging with fright:

"Our master, Murad Pasha Effendi, is dark of countenance, and will speak with the *Hanoums* alone," she cried.

The women sprang up, alarmed at the child's

fright, and the slaves, who were serving the breakfast, vanished into the corridors. Zayleh shrank into a corner at the sight of Murad's distorted face, but Fatma, with a vague premonition, ran to meet him. Mihirmah stood perfectly still, astonished and curious.

"My son?" Selim's mother cried. "Tell me, Murad, where is my son?"

The suddenness of the question staggered her husband, and for a moment speech failed him. Then he clasped her arm and held it, firmly but not roughly. For the first time in many years Murad of Gorenno turned back to his first wife.

"Fatma," he said, "we have no son."

The woman staggered. "Murad," she breathed, wide-eyed, "what has he done? Where is he? You have not cast him out?"

"Cast him out?" Murad laughed in his bitterness. "No, I have not cast him out."

"He is not——?" But Fatma read the truth in Murad's withered face. The room swam about her; she reached out aimlessly for some support.

He led her to the divan and sat down beside her while he told Mustafa's story. His fury grew with every word he uttered; all his baffled ambition of discomfiting and balking Akiff Pasha, —perhaps even of ousting him from the governorship of Uskub,—the hopes, now vain, of glory in his old age,—swelled the father's grief over the loss of his firstborn. By the time the old

man had finished, he had worked himself into a frenzy.

"Gather your trappings together," he cried at last, springing to his feet and pacing the floor. "By the end of the third day, not a stone shall be left standing, nor a Bulgar grunt heard in Gorenó!"

"And when you have done that," Mihirmah spoke with intense quiet, "will Selim Bey be again in his mother's arms?"

Murad whirled on her sternly, but Fatma ran between them.

"No," she cried in a shrill, thin voice, "it will not bring my darling to me. But it will snatch a hundred and more *giaur* sons from their mothers' arms. You will do this thing, Murad! Tell me, promise me you will revenge our Selim."

"Stop, Fatma *Hanoum*," Mihirmah cut her short. "What are you asking? Kill brigands, revolutionists—that is revenge. But the old men, the women, the children of Gorenó—how can they answer for your son's death?"

"They will answer because I say they shall answer," Murad thundered. "Are you a *giaur* yourself that you plead their cause, or the Mohammedan slave I took you for?"

Mihirmah's face burned fire, but she would try once more.

"Gently, Murad Pasha," she cautioned. "Softly. We are not of noble birth—not *all* of us here, and some of us are not as young as years

ago. Whatever Gorenó does not do, it does pay taxes. A brigand's toy-shop would be a hard business for the sixty-year-old Pride of the Vardar."

Murad's beard was flecked with froth. He sprang at the former *seraili* tiger-like, when Zayleh darted from her corner and ran between them.

"I hate the ground she treads on, Murad, but this time she is right. We need Gorenó. Think of our little Ali!"

But Murad shook her off. He heard only Fatma's cry for revenge, he thought only of his own outraged governorship, but he did not touch Mihirmah.

She walked away silently, but her whole being throbbed with the sense of battle. Had Murad seen the fire in those deep brown eyes, he would have known that she, too, realized it was a war to the bitter end between them.

CHAPTER XLIV

A LEADER ALMOST LOST

THE little group in old Toshō's farthest sheep-shed were obviously waiting for someone. It was not late by the clock on this Tuesday evening, but already darkness had closed down, and the inside of the windowless shack would have been as black as midnight but for the candle flickering on a broad ledge projecting from the wall. Stoyan, Peter, Croom, Gani, and Uncle Dimo sat cross-legged, Turk-fashion, on the straw scattered over the floor; Adalena, on a small three-cornered milking-stool, leaned back against the wall in a dark corner of the shed and offered no comment on the subject under discussion.

She wore no disguise to-night, but had donned one of Irina's peasant dresses, a plain black woolen frock over a white slip that was gathered about her throat and reached below the short sleeves and the bottom of the black skirt. Her hair coiled in a heavy loose braid about her head, and half-hid under the white, blue-embroidered, three-cornered scarf of the Pirin peasant woman.

But the scarf was tied loosely, and the wavy masses of hair rested on her forehead, matching the dark eyes and setting off by contrast her forehead, which could be ivory-white when she did not choose to play the man.

The girl was paler and thinner than she had been in the cave. Mother Yana had needed all her skill as nurse to keep her from serious illness, but neither her own nor Irina's efforts had availed in restoring their guest's spirits.

On Sunday afternoon she had been taking a short ramble over the near-pastures with Ivan's sister, when a stranger in peasant dress passed old Tosho's gateway. After he had disappeared, Ivan noticed Boyan's note tucked in the bolt. He departed immediately, leaving a brief message to Ada to hold herself ready for any emergency, and if nothing untoward happened, to have Gani, Stoyan, Uncle Dimo, and the Dobreff brothers wait for him in his father's upper shed on Tuesday night.

But what had become of Boyan? The question tormented every waking moment, and night brought her only new visions of the tiny hut, the wracking day in the cave. Over and over in her dreams, it was Boyan who came to her rescue. Sometimes he was hurling huge fire-brands at the two Turks, another time he was firing at them with dice for bullets, but Selim only caught the flying cubes and counted the spots as they turned up.

She had been too weak and ill to venture away after Ivan took her to the Seven Well-springs, so he had climbed alone to the cabin, only to find it empty. Whether Boyan had been found by Turks or brigands; whether he had managed in some way to free himself—Adalena could only wonder and guess. But if he had freed himself, why was he not seeking her? Or was he?

She wondered if Ivan's absence was in any way connected with Boyan; she wondered why he had wanted the Goreno men to meet him in the shed. Uncle Tosho was away on a visit to his old brother in Kotchana, and Adalena's news came through the women only, or through a passing shepherd or cattle-boy.

She was wrapped in her own thoughts as she sat apart on her milking-stool, but Gani's remarks roused her; she had paid no attention before to Goreno gossip.

"Well, I don't know what it portends, Stoyan," Gani had said, "but the *konak* has been shut as close as a clam's shell all day. Rumors are as thick in Goreno as garlic in a gypsy's soup, but no one knows anything."

"I heard," Stoyan the Chandler said softly, "that Murad Pasha had had a stroke—or something."

"Not Murad," Croom Dobreff the Carpenter corrected him, "for I was fixing Abraham's chimney this morning and could look over the *konak* wall into the courtyard. No one came in sight

for a long time, then the old man himself crossed from the harem with a couple of the garrison captains. They had their heads mighty close together, but I couldn't help noticing, Comrades, what an old rotten turnip Murad Pasha really is."

"After I sent the children home from school this afternoon," Uncle Dimo put in, "our little Mirko—Dobry's brother, you know—lingered behind. When I asked him what he wanted, he came very close and whispered, 'Selim Bey hasn't been heard of for two days, Master Dimo.' 'Well,' I laughed, 'Selim Bey has been gone for weeks without telling Goreno about it.' 'I don't know what's the matter,' the child answered, 'but I feel awful scared, Master Dimo.' So I walked along with him as far as his house."

"The boy is as nervous as a rabbit since he lost his brother," Stoyan interrupted, and the men nodded in sympathetic sorrow.

"And yet," Uncle Dimo added thoughtfully, "I'm not sure just now that he hasn't reason to be nervous——"

"*Sst!*" Peter, who sat nearest the door, lifted a warning finger and put his ear to the crack. Adalena leaned forward, her heart pounding against her breast. In the utter silence of the shed, they heard the tap: a long stroke, two short, and another long beat. No one stirred or breathed until the second signal came: twice, thrice the newcomer tapped against the door,

then the fist struck a slow, long beat and seemed to linger against the board.

Peter drew the bolt and lifted the latch noiselessly. Ivan the Huntsman glided into the room; a step behind him came Boyan himself. Adalena started from her seat, then sat down as suddenly as she had risen. She felt a sudden desire to hear what he had to say for himself while he was still unaware of her presence.

Boyan evidently was not looking for her, and if Ivan noticed her presence, he gave no sign.

"Comrades," the Huntsman said when the door was barred again and the men had resumed their places, "I wanted to meet you here to-night because I felt sure from whom my summons came the other day. Who brought it was a detail which, fortunately, I did not learn." And in brief, vivid style, Ivan narrated the story of Stanko's inn and the Komari Bog. "And so here we are, Comrades," he finished, "with one more brave warrior added to our lists and one blood-sucker less in Macedonia."

A low exclamation went from lip to lip of his listeners. The vague, uneasy rumors afloat in Goreno, and the ominous quiet of the *konak* were explained at last—fearfully explained. Uncle Dimo drew himself up and approached Boyan. The handshake he gave him was portentously serious.

"You are welcome among us, my brother," he said. "How long you will be among us, how

long any of us shall be together;—my heart fails me when I ask that question. You wonder how long it will be before Murad misses his son, Ivan? Murad has missed him already, if I mistake not.” He stopped a moment before he finished.

“I told you how nervous the little Mirko had been this afternoon. After the child got home, I walked on by the river bank until I came out on the highway leading over the bridge. As I passed by the abandoned blacksmith shop, I thought I heard some one groaning. When I stepped into the doorway, I was sure of it. In a corner of the cellar, tied hand and foot, I found the miserable wretch who was to carry the note to Ivan. Selim Bey had left him rotting in that hole since Saturday; I brought him some water and bread, and as soon as it was dark, moved him home. He told me of Mustafa’s coming to meet Selim there, but that Selim never came.”

Ivan’s face was very grave as he listened to the old school-master. He looked from one to the other; he read the same thoughts in every face.

“Men,” he said at last, “we haven’t a day to lose. If I am not mistaken, Murad will leave no stone unturned to unearth us. We must arm the entire district at once, for when he gets on our trail, it will be a fight to the death.”

“Thank God for the tax-money,” Gani the Driver said. “Is the second half of it all changed, Stoyan?”

The Chandler went to a dark corner and dug

for a moment under a heap of straw. Gold pieces chinked softly as he drew out a tough leather bag.

"Every piaster," he said proudly. "And, Comrades, I have a suggestion to make. Our *bash-komitaji* has shown he can silence Murad Pasha in a court-room, shown loyalty and genius at every turn. Let us appoint him to put this gold with the other half; to see that it gets carried over the border at once; and that arms are brought back to the Goreno district. Are you agreed?"

"Aye, aye," the men said heartily. Adalena's heart warmed with pride. At last he was to fill the place she had chosen for him in her dreams; he was to be the messenger and the hope of fighting Goreno. With an effort she held back, her eyes eager to watch him, unaware of her presence, accept his commission from the men.

Stoyan the Chandler picked up the bag and handed it to Boyan. But he shrank visibly and did not touch it.

"I—can not!" he whispered huskily. "I was to save the other half, and—the gold is gone."

The girl in the corner forgot herself completely; she bounded from her dark corner and clasped her hands around his arm:

"Gone, Boyan?" she cried. "Gone—our gold?"

"Ada!" the man gasped. "*Ada moyal!*"

A great joy flooded his face. For the moment he forgot the circle of men, Murad Pasha, Gorenno—all save the fact that she was there.

"Ada *moyal*!" He held her in his arms jealously, possessingly, and lifted her face to his lips.

"*Boyan!*" she protested, breaking away, her face crimson with confusion. His eyes clouded as he met again the astonished looks of the Gorenno patriots. Without uttering a word, he leaned wearily against the door of the shed.

"Are you sure you looked in the right place?" the Chandler asked compassionately.

"I followed Ivan's directions implicitly," Boyan answered. "Third sleeve to the right after the 'Turk's Head'—wasn't that right, Ivan? The blazed oak was there, the forked pine, and the dwarfed birch-tree with the boulder by its trunk. But when I lifted the stone, the money was gone."

"And you were the only one beside Ivan who knew?"

A chilly, uneasy silence fell on the little group.

"One hundred thousand piasters in gold," Croom groaned. Gani chewed furiously at a piece of straw, to keep from talking. After all, Boyan was a stranger to them. He had offered himself as the *bash-komitaji* monk; but was it for Macedonia's sake? He had saved Adalena by doing it, and he loved her. Besides that, and the fact that Ivan trusted him, he had nothing to recommend him to them.

Even Adalena was still. Had he not kissed her, she could have spoken. But now—— Their eyes met; his begged, pleaded, demanded that she should not doubt him. Her heart ached with his pain. The silence became unendurable. She stepped up to him once more.

"Boyan,"—her voice shook a little, but it was clear and unmistakable,—"*I believe in you.*"

Then she turned to the men.

The door behind them shook with a violent knocking. Stoyan grabbed the leather bag and buried it under the heap of straw. Some one blew out the candle.

"Uncle Dimo, Ivan, my son! Let us in!"

"My father has come back!" The Huntsman rushed toward the entrance.

"And Mirko!" Uncle Dimo cried, unbolting the door. As it swung open, the lad darted in, and old Tosho stumbled after him, carrying a lantern.

"Goreno," the breathless boy gasped out. "I heard two Turks talking—Murad Pasha has called the whole garrison out: he is going to kill us all—all Goreno!"

"My babies!" Stoyan groaned, snatching up his pistol.

"Off, all of us!" Boyan thundered: "We'll need every rifle to-night, men."

"Mother and the children?" Ivan questioned his father.

"They will be off in ten minutes, together with

Ivko and his boy, for George's, over by the Yellow Pastures. They will be safe there. And you, my son?"

"I'll be needed down in Goreno to-night, father."

"And I, too," the old man answered.

Running, stumbling, recklessly the men rushed down the road to Goreno. The distant echo of trumpet calls came up from the town—already the soldiers must be pouring out of the *konak*!

Suddenly Boyan turned about.

"Adalena!" he cried, "go with the women folk to the Yellow Pastures! Where are you coming?"

"With you," she breathed as she hurried along. "Always with you, Boyan."

CHAPTER XLV

AN OLD SONG

GORENO stirred ominously. Soldiers goose-stepped up and down the *konak* court; wolfish Bashibozouk irregulars slouched along the corridors of the prison pulling at their mustaches and oiling long bayoneted rifles and ugly, thirsty-looking *yataghan* daggers. Sneaking in from corners and scooting up unfrequented alleys, the Turkish townsmen crept unobserved into the *konak*-cellar and licked their lips in anticipation of the night's work. They had all dealt with the natives: every Moslem son of them was now assigning to his own province some special prize in some luckless Bulgar's house.

All over the town gates opened and closed warily. A vague rumor was in the air. Women glanced anxiously up and down the street, stole out, or called across to a passerby, whispering questions, until a *kadin's* curses interrupted the inquiry from a neighboring Moslem window. A dim, dark sense of some hideous fatality disturbed Goreno womankind.

Women and children crouched behind their

gates, trembling to glance out upon the streets, waiting for the men to return from their shops, and the next moment fled their houses seeking news and comfort from their neighbors. And the late afternoon, deceptively warm in mid-winter, wore on pitilessly; the shadows of the disconcerted wives of Gorenó grew ominously long, portentous. Evening wore into night; death was in the winter-wind. The Turks knew it, stole glances through the *konak* windows, and leered at the confused natives.

Drums beat threateningly; the *konak* gates opened; and the soldiers and irregulars poured into the market-place. Suddenly the gong in the old stone church began to ring wildly. Over the yells of the Turkish soldiery, loosed for action, the vibrant notes sounded throughout the town: "Come, Come, Come Unto Me!" and the terrorized Bulgars fled to its open doors. But some thought of gold and silver and silk-embroideries; some fled the twilit streets and hid behind bolted gates and barred windows. And, as the church gong rang warningly, comfortingly that Tuesday night, many a knee in Gorenó bent in prayer before the home icon, and tears mixed with the drippings of sputtering candles, burned low and ready to go out.

Like pent-up torrents breaking through a crumbling dam, the flood of Moslem fanatics and plain Turkish rascals burst out upon the hapless, unprepared Gorenó. Trumpet and drum-beat

struck the first strains of the oldest song in Macedonia; the mob of fez-wearing fiends took it up with howls and execrations; the Great Inscrutable began another chapter.

Have you read it, Oh Friend of the Drowsy Verandas—that blood-charactered, fire-illuminated chronicle of carnage, fire and *yataghan*, rapine and pillage, sack and bloodthirst and bestiality? Can you copy it in seemly type that would not outrage your decorous respectability? Paraphrase and translate it into a language of Thousand-and-One-Night romance, stressing the orientalism, smoothing, skipping, scratching out the syllables of shame, the loathsome words, the paragraphs of things unutterable?

In a corner opposite the church square, just as they darted to the gates, Stoyan the Chandler, his wife, and three children were penned in by half-a-dozen Bashibozouks. They crushed his head against the brick-wall; the two boys lay in mutilated fragments in the middle of the street; but the mother was too young to kill outright, and followed her fourteen-year-old daughter, tied and tossed onto a donkey's back.

White-haired Uncle Dimo, caught in his own doorway, hung from a cross-beam in his cellar, an iron chain gripping his bare ankles. The old, worn body hung limp: the tired blood strained the emaciated cheeks, and the tongue stuck out of the mouth in hopeless agony. The soldiers had moved on and left him in charge of a six-

teen year-old Turkish knave, who had tied his hands in a noose and was swinging him back and forth by means of a rope. The head just scraped the floor, on which the ingenious young devil had poured pine tar; the matted hair caught, pulled, stuck.

"Who pecked Murad Pasha's money, you old gander?" the Turkish boy jeered. "And where is Selim Bey?" Through a crack in the rough board floor just above him, a tiny red stream dripped, dripped—where Dimovitsa, his good old wife, had fallen.

Gani, the wagon-driver, creeping from shadow to shadow across the market-place to his home, caught and dragged to the *konak* jail, lay stripped to the skin on an iron stretcher over a slow-burning charcoal brazier. The rawhide whip snapped as it fell, and broke the blisters.

"Where is Murad's gold and silver, you leprous hypocrite?" Mahmut snarled at him.

Old Priest Azarias, faithful shepherd of a luckless flock, lingered one moment too long in the church square, waiting for an old woman to catch up with him and lead her in to safety. The old woman reached the entrance; but a bullet reached old Azarias. The Turks nailed him onto a popular trunk in the center of the square: a hideous crucifix.

Splinters hammered under finger-nails and toenails; gunpowder shaken in the eyes and set ablaze; boiling hot olive oil poured down bleed-

ing ears; noses chopped off and eyes gouged out. . . .

In the palace chambers above the *konak* cellar, Murad Pasha presided over a wanton carnival. Glasses clinked, plates rattled, the halls rang with the vile ribaldry, drowning the shrieks of victims killed and worse than killed. Murad Pasha beamed bestial triumph. He lingered to observe more closely, he looked out of the window: fire and sword were doing their work in thorough Osmanli style. The Pride of the Vardar surveyed it all, and saw that it was good; he rubbed his hands and stepped out upon the balcony to see the better.

Dinner grew cold in the Pasha's harem on that Tuesday night; the slaves who brought the dishes took them back untouched, tiptoeing along the corridor with white scared faces. No one thought of going to bed. Sumruda, the second wife, bent over her work, trying to embroider by a dim candle light and help the nervous moments pass. In a dusky corner Zayleh rocked the little Ali and moaned rather than sang a monotonous Turkish lullaby, but the child fretted restlessly and would not sleep. His wailing must have disturbed Fatma, who lay face-downward on the long divan in the oriel-window, for every now and then she raised her head and glared blackly at the child. Zayleh shrank from her look, and tried to cover the boy with her cashmere shawl

to shut out the evil eye; but he pushed it away and cried the harder.

Up and down, covering the length of the room with quick, nervous steps, Mihirmah wracked her brain with questions of the night: What was happening in the barracks below? What was to happen in the town outside? What could the next hours bring to Gorenó? Once she went to the window and opened it; peering into the darkness.

"Do shut that window, Mihirmah *Hanoum*," Zayleh complained. "Can't you hear Ali coughing?" She shivered and turned her back to the draft. Mihirmah closed the window and resumed her walk, stepping noiselessly so she would not miss a sound from outside. She could notice how intently Fatma, too, was listening, and how now and again she shaded the glass with her hand and pressed her shriveled ear against the pane. The fierce, hungry look in her eyes as she waited made Mihirmah writhe with the sense of what it portended. She turned to leave——

A long drum-beat rolled up from the soldiers' court and reverberated through the room. Heedless of Zayleh's cries, Mihirmah ran back to her window and strained her eyes through the lattice. For a moment she worked at the frame which held the heavy bars, then she pushed it back slowly and leaned over the sill.

Long pine torches flared in front of the *konak* and out on the market-place. Mihirmah could

hear the rapid march of the garrison as they crowded through the gateway, and the terse orders of the officers. Then her heart froze with despair and horror: the church gong began its nerve-tearing clangor, and the hideous answering yells of *zaptiehs* and Bashibozouks drowned the cry of a hundred Gorenos throats.

"Hear them! Hear them!" Fatma cried savagely, springing from the divan. "Selim's own spirit is leading them!"

Flames leaped from a dozen houses all at once and illumined the narrow streets and crooked alleys; huge bonfires of pitch-soaked pine-boards flamed before locked doors where the inhabitants, too tardy to reach the church, made useless resistance.

"Ha, did you see that?" Fatma exulted passionately.

Mihirmah had seen it; seen what the rains of a hundred years could not blot out. The youth had been so stalwart, fighting in that doorway! She could see his dark hair, his defiant eyes; she could imagine the play of his muscles as he swung his huge club. But one bullet through his head, and the old woman behind him shrank back into the darkness, defenseless.

The luxurious, beauty-loving harem-woman felt her very reason slipping away as she watched the soldiers rush across that dead body at the living body that waved her arms impotently. Mihirmah tried to turn away from the window, but that

scene of agony compelled her—and other scenes—others——

And this wanton sacrifice of manhood and womanhood avenged the death of a libertine, already soaked in a hundred iniquities; healed the lacerated pride of a man bloody-minded and fetid! She could hear, now faintly, now clearly, the riotous carousal from Murad's banquet hall, and Murad's own voice as he stood on the balcony.

The soldiers were firing on the church now. Mihirmah could see its white, squarish tower silhouetted against the sky; she fancied she could almost hear the walls crumbling. A corner of the tower fell.

"And when the walls give in——" The third wife had heard of what happened in such churches.

Suddenly she stiffened, the wild idea that rushed into her brain stopped, crystallized.

"Before those walls crumble——" she breathed. "Murad Pasha shall never see those walls crumble!"

Out in the corridor Mihirmah stopped to wonder at her own cool daring, stopped to admire, but she did not waver. Not a living creature was in sight; she groped her way very cautiously down the passage, trying to remember every turn after she had left the harem when she went to meet Boyan.

Boyan? Mihirmah thrust back the thought of

him; her whole unrequited passion for the *bash-komitaji* had changed through the long days into a fantastic passion for his people. She was hopelessly trapped,—she could never be free,—but they?

A turn of the corridor, and she looked straight ahead to an open balcony where the Pasha and his intimates hurled their orders over the *konak* wall. Murad stood nearest the door, his left hand up against the casing, the other outstretched to the railing.

"A whole bagful of noses I want,—you know, Hussein?" he called to a passing *zaptieh*, and burst into a laugh.

The laugh ended in a sharp, sudden cough.

"Oh!" Murad clapped his hand to his left side and touched the finest of daggers, buried to its hilt. "Poisoned," he gasped, staggering against the wall, his face livid with terror.

For a moment he clutched the air uncertainly, then he fell.

An officer sprang inside and caught sight of the dark figure hurrying down the passage. An instant; he fired. The figure stumbled; he fired again, and it fell face forward. The Turk ran up and turned it over.

"A woman!" he exclaimed as he pushed back the thin veil. "What a beauty!"

Her white lips moved, the eyelids flickered, opened, closed.

"Free!" Mihirmah murmured.

Outside the riot grew, as a calmly smiling, sophisticated Macedonian moon rose slowly over the eastern mountains.

Plunder and pillage, lords of Mohammed! Gorenno is yours. Cry your loudest, daughter of Macedon: Heaven is a vast, leaden vault, dull and unresponsive: God is deaf and dumb this evening and this night. God is too high to hear you, and the Tsar too far to help. For this is Turkey; thus has it been with your mothers and your mothers' mothers these thirteen ghastly generations. Old Turkey, Young Turkey—sing the song in any key you please, it is the same old dirge of desolation. This is not Europe; this is Islam land! . . .

CHAPTER XLVI

BEHIND THE ALTAR

HUDDLED in the middle of the church, Goreno womanhood knelt and waited; some of them prayed. Small children sobbed with no one to soothe them; old, frail grandfathers crouched on the cold stones and trembled with the certain knowledge of what impended. The church was their only refuge, and it was a death-trap. Every man and boy strong enough to bear a club paced the aisles and watched—waited for the final onrush which was imminent, once the Turks had beaten through the thick wall that surrounded the paved church-court.

Some dozen fortunates, who owned rifles and bullets, had climbed into the tower and were picking off their men with every one of the precious bits of lead. But the supply was meager.

And all the while the bell kept up its wild ringing.

"You might as well stop now, Adalena," Boyan called down to her. "Every one is inside who dares to cross the square. The jackals have us completely surrounded."

She left the bell-rope and climbed the stairway to his side. The despairing wails from the church below came faintly in the midst of the riot outside.

"If we only had guns enough, Boyan!" the girl said, as she crept to him. "We could try a counter attack."

He shook his head: she could see the square jaw, the white, rigid face.

"We haven't bullets enough," he answered. "The attack was too sudden for men to think, and most of them brought only families. Even I have only three cartridges left."

She counted the leaden fingers projecting from his belt.

"Four," she corrected.

"Three."

"And the fourth?"

He looked at her quietly.

"The fourth is for you, darling. The Turks will kill me fast enough."

Ivan came up to them with his father.

"Don't shoot! We had better save the rest of our bullets for the final rush," Ivan advised grimly. "The men below have only clubs, you know, and they don't reach far."

Adalena looked into his face, searching for one gleam of hope. "Haven't we any chance at all?" she begged.

"We haven't a ghost's shadow of a chance, once they get inside the wall," Ivan answered.

"Look down there, and you can see for yourself."

Adalena looked, then looked again. Four Turks had drawn up a small cannon, loaded it, and were pointing it directly at the corner of the tower where they were standing. In an instant she realized their own danger.

"Quick, down the stairs!" Boyan, too, had seen it, whirled and swung her away. The stone cracked, split wide apart, and the tower's corner toppled with a crash to the pavement below. The exultant yell of the Bashibozouks reverberated in wails of despair inside the church-prison. Bits of stone showered about the little platform as it rocked with the force of the blow. The men scrambled hastily down the steps.

"Are you hurt, Ada?"

"I'm not," she said, "but, Boyan, look at Ivan! Something has happened to Uncle Toshō."

The old shepherd lay crumpled on his back where the stones had showered about his head, with an ugly gash just above his temple. He was breathing hard as he lay half-supported in his son's arms, and struggled violently. Half-a-dozen times he opened his mouth in a vain effort to speak.

Adalena knelt quickly by his side, and tried to stop the blood-flow with her handkerchief. Boyan touched a tiny flask of *raki* to the old man's lips. He lay very still a moment, then his eyes brightened.

"Ivan," he spoke softly, saving every ounce of strength, "I should have told you earlier. I didn't think there was any hurry and you were safer by not knowing.

"Yes, father?"

"Three weeks ago, while you were away, a couple of brigands came to the Seven Well-springs, and tried to make me tell where you hid the gold. They had discovered your boat and scoured the forest for some other clue, until they finally found the blazed oak——"

The Huntsman hung on his father's words.

"In spite of all their digging, though, they missed the money itself. You remember you told me where it was, just before you went to Uskub?"

The son nodded eagerly and bent lower, not to lose a syllable. Tosho wavered a little, then went on with a greater effort.

"You weren't at home, son," the old man complained. "I knew those men would turn every stone in the forest; so one night, before I went to Kotchana, you know——"

"Yes, yes, father——"

"One night I went and found the place, carried the gold away—back home—to Seven Well-springs——"

"Boyan!" Adalena cried, a great joy leaping into her eyes. But Boyan did not answer; he and the Huntsman watched greedily the shepherd's every breath. Again he put the flask to his lips; Tosho drained its very dregs.

"And now, father?" Ivan encouraged him, "now it is——"

"Safe," old Tosho whispered. "It is safe now."

"But where, father, where?" Ivan whispered in his father's ear.

"I dropped it down the deep well—behind the old cowshed. The water is bitter, and nobody draws from it now. But, son Ivan, nobody knows—I was waiting to tell you later." The old man's voice grew tragic. "And I made a grappling hook—under the foundation—to reach the bottom. Somebody ought to go, Ivan"—the shepherd half-raised himself—"somebody *must* go, to save that money, for—for——"

The blood rushed from his temple over the soaked handkerchief as he spoke, his lips grew livid, and he fell forward, his face on his knees.

"Dead," Ivan said simply, and carried him over to a protected corner of the tower. "Better this way than—later. Father!"

The three stood in silence for a moment, and the moon, just over the mountain's crest, sent a long shining beam around the old man's white, blood-stained head. Adalena bent low and touched the forehead with her lips.

"And our work," she said, "our risk, which brought us all here, is—under a heap of straw and in the bottom of a well!"

Ivan raised his head with a sudden determination.

"Boyan," he asked, "are you great enough to live for us all?"

Boyan looked at him. "I—don't know!" he answered.

"That money must be saved," the Huntsman went on. "If for no other reason, to prevent—that again." He pointed to the unarmed men below them.

"But for more than that. In the back of the church, behind the altar, where the court wall touches the wall of the church, is a long, narrow door. It leads into a cellar that connects with Priest Azarias' kitchen. You and Ada must creep through that and do your best to make an escape. You have one chance in a thousand, but that chance you must risk."

Boyan drew back. "*I go, Ivan?*" he said. "And you stay to do a man's work?" He shook his head. "We can't spare an arm from downstairs."

"One man more or less does not matter there," the Huntsman answered. "But you are the only man here who can save the money. I can't go—I have an aunt and three cousins, helpless downstairs. If you don't want this slaughter to be wholly futile, if you don't want this to be our murder," he pointed to his father, "you will save that money for the Cause."

"And when we have saved it?"

A fearful explosion tore the night and cut short any answer. Stones and bits of brick and tile shot

high into the air and fell like huge hail-stones about the church. A cannon-ball had pierced a hole in the front wall of the church-yard.

"At the church," the Turks yelled.

Ivan pushed the other two to the stairs. "Not a moment!" he shouted at them. "Go—both of you!"

They raced down the twisty steps and in among the terror-stricken Bulgars.

"Here, under the altar," Ivan pulled away the overhanging cloth and lifted the latch. Adalena turned and grasped his hand.

"Ivan," she said, "fighting is useless. When they break through the front door, why don't you bring the people this way?"

Ivan shook his head doubtfully. "Two might slip through," he said. "But a crowd—they will be caught. Still—we shall see."

"Try—Try, Ivan," Adalena urged. "Promise us you will try!"

He took her hand tightly in his.

"Fare thee well, little comrade," he said. "I shall do my best. I may meet you yet in Sofia," and he smiled.

She slipped away and down the stairs. Boyan followed. Just before the door closed, the Huntsman knelt and whispered in his ear.

"Take her away," he said. "Take her to Bulgaria. There is no fighting chance in Macedonia—yet."

Boyan started at the words. He heard his fa-

ther's voice in Ivan's. Then the door closed, and he stumbled after the girl.

They felt the church tremble above them from the battering on its doors, but they had no time to linger. Away through the narrow passage into an open cellar, up the stairs, and they came into the priest's kitchen. Boyan slipped to the door and peered out. A long dark alley stretched before them—empty!

"Ada, Ada," he cried softly, "come. I believe we can make it."

She was still by the cellar door, listening. They could hear the muffled confusion, then a sudden uproar, and Ivan's voice called loudly:

"Anyone who wants to try a dash, follow me!"

"Come—Ada!" Boyan snatched her hand, threw open the door, and at lightning speed they raced down the tortuous alley-way. Dodging, turning, hugging the shadows, never pausing to look back, they fled on—on—away from Goreno.

CHAPTER XLVII

JUST BEFORE DAWN

ATOP the crest of a bald cliff rising tower-like above the pine-woods which skirt the Ladna River, Adalena and Boyan halted and turned around for one last look at Goreno. Above them to the left Vishny Peak glimmered like dull silver in the pale crepuscular sheen. The lower mountain-reaches and the valley of Goreno stretched away in the dim twilight of the dawning.

He laid the two heavy leather bags in front of them, and drew a long, dizzy breath.

"How we have managed to get here, I shall never know," he said.

Adalena made no reply; perhaps she did not even hear him; she gazed fixedly in the distant valley. They were too far away to hear groans of agony or howls, and the lurid glare of the burning town which had joined with the moonlight in guiding them through the night, had died away with the setting of the moon. Goreno was heaps of burning coals and smoking foundations; only in one spot—presumably the open court around the church—tongues of flame shot up dartlike.

Turkdom must still be there, putting the last touches to a night hideous and long as nights can be long only in Macedonia.

She shivered and closed her eyes, as if to shut out the vision of what she could not see.

What she did not see, and dared not imagine, were the hardier dozen or two of men, women, and children, who worked their way through the town and down along the river, guided by the Huntsman of Pirin and the two Dobreff brothers. Little Mirko clutched at Ivan's coat and urged his aunt to walk faster. Pursuit caught up with them at every corner, but they fought it back, and pushed on. The edge of the town was bleak; the church court encircled by blazing fires was warm, inviting, and the victims there were defenceless, ready at hand.

"Let these roaches slip away," the Turks cried at last, and gave up the chase. "We've enough and to spare in town."

And Ivan led them on, guarding against unexpected, renewed pursuit, avoiding the safer, upper trails where he felt sure Boyan and Adalena were carrying the precious bags.

"You are cold?" Boyan drew her to him gently and wrapped her cape more closely about her.

"Cold?" she answered. "My very soul is cold, Boyan." She laid a weary head on his shoulder and he touched it tenderly. His face was grave, thoughtful; around his mouth she

could see the set, determined lines. The girl heaved a long-drawn sigh.

"Some day, Boyan," she said, "we may be glad we are alive. But to-night—it seems so—hopeless—I wish we had stayed and ended it—down there." Her voice broke in a sob and she clung to him motionless, silent.

He held her more closely, relentlessly. She knew the import of his embrace, though he said not a word. She felt herself and all her firm resolution crumbling to powder in his arms. He forced her to raise her head and look in his face.

"Adalena," he said firmly, "now we are going to Bulgaria."

She trembled at his words.

"See, Boyan," she pointed northward, "across the next range are the Brigand Highlands where no Turkish soldiers dare follow us."

"Beyond is Bulgaria," he said simply,—“our destination.”

But she made one last effort.

"Boyan, my Boyan, look! In this maze of upland wilds and lost valleys, shepherd homes are waiting for your message and mine."

"Yes, shepherd homes still unburned. Adalena," he counted his words. "You and I shall never cause another such night as this, for when we see Macedonia again it will be from the ranks of the Bulgarian army."

"But until the Bulgarian army can come?"

"Until that day we shall preach a Balkan

crusade in Bulgaria. Any other way is hopeless and ends in ashes. I know it, and to-night you know it too."

She turned away from him and from the valley.

"Let us go, then," she said.

But he held her back one second longer. His grave eyes almost smiled into her own.

"We shall preach a crusade, and we shall fight too, Adalena. But —first, and last, and all the time, Ada *moya*, you are going to belong to me."

She tried desperately to meet his eyes; but her lashes went down.

"Let us go," she murmured.

The bags of gold he concealed under his rough black shepherd cape; and she followed in his steps across the snow-swept Pirin wilderness, northward-bound.

And behind them Macedonia still slept her troubled sleep, dreaming of the dawn that had tarried half a thousand years.

THE END

